

# War, Rebellion and Epic in Byzantine North Africa

A Historical Study of  
*Corippus' Iohannis*



Andy Merrills

## WAR, REBELLION AND EPIC IN BYZANTINE NORTH AFRICA

In around 550 the Latin poet Corippus composed his epic *Iohannis* to celebrate the forgotten wars of a Byzantine general against the 'Moorish' or 'Berber' peoples of North Africa. This book explores the rich narrative of that poem and the changing political, social and cultural environment within which he worked. It reappraises the dramatic first decades of Byzantine North Africa (533–550) and discusses the ethnography of Moorish Africa, the diplomatic and military history of the imperial administration, and the religious transformations (both Christian and 'pagan') of this period. By considering the *Iohannis* as a political text, it sheds new light on the continued importance of poetry and literature on the southern fringes of imperial power, and presents a model for reading epic as a historical source. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

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*University of Leicester*



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For John Graham Merrills (1942–2018)  
With love



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## *Preface*

The decision to write this book crept up on me somewhat unexpectedly. For several years, I had been struggling with historical questions surrounding the nature of ‘Moorish’ or ‘Berber’ societies in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. The *Iohannis* is a central source for understanding these groups, but the more I worked with it, the less I seemed to understand. Corippus’ poem has long been exploited by historians and archaeologists of North Africa as an invaluable repository of information, and by a small number of brave philologists as a peculiar late flowering of Latin verse, but these two strands had rarely been reconciled. Why precisely did Corippus write an epic about a minor military campaign that barely warranted notice outside Africa? If his intention was to celebrate imperial power (as is generally assumed), why did he do so in almost 5,000 hexameter lines, rather than using the conventional medium of panegyric? And why did he include within his work so many extended criticisms of imperial bureaucratic incompetence? If he sought to demonize ‘the Moors’ in a display of metropolitan chauvinism, why are figures like the ally Cusina presented in such laudatory terms? And if Corippus is to be trusted as a source on the complex ethnography of the frontier zone, how can we reconcile this with his evident debts to the literary tradition of Latin epic? It seemed that the only way of approaching these questions was to look at the text itself and the historical circumstances of its production. And the appropriate medium for this was on a grand scale which Corippus himself might have appreciated; hence this book.

Inevitably, this opened up a whole new raft of challenges. There are many difficulties with the text of the *Iohannis*, thanks to its unique transmission history. As discussed in Chapter 1, the poem has been the object of extensive philological scrutiny since its rediscovery at the start of the nineteenth century, and this process is ongoing. As a historian by training, rather than a late Latinist, my intention has been to discuss the *Iohannis* in its historical context, rather than consider strictly textual issues.

As such, I have necessarily leaned very heavily on the philological scholarship of others.

Translations of passages from the text are my own, but I am enormously grateful to Paul Roche and especially Aaron Pelttari for their diligent help with Corippus' frequently baffling Latinity. Aaron in particular has improved my halting English translations in every respect; his efforts have improved what follows considerably and set the discussion on much firmer foundations. Throughout, I have used the edition of Diggle and Goodyear published by Cambridge University Press in 1970. This remains the standard complete edition of the epic, although revised editions of Books I, II, III, IV and VIII have now been published, and have also been consulted. In a small number of cases, I have followed the proposed readings of these editions; these are noted appropriately. I have consulted: the complete translations of G. W. Shea (into English), J. Didderen (into French) and Ana Ramírez Tirado (into Spanish), as well as the translations and commentaries of individual books and passages by Maria Assunta Vinchesi, Chiara Tommasi Moreschini, Vincent Zarini, Yves Modéran, Benjamin Goldlust and Peter Riedlberger. I have deferred to conventional English tenses for ease of understanding in my translation (Corippus often uses a vivid present tense in narrating past events, which can be confusing). In the absence of a reliable English translation of the *Chronicle* of Victor of Tunnuna, the few excerpts from that text are also my own. For all other ancient texts, I have used published translations, which are marked accordingly.

For clarity – and for the convenience of non-specialists – I have followed the book numbering and line ordering of Diggle and Goodyear (excepting a small number of cases which are identified in the notes). Peter Riedlberger and Giulia Caramico have recently demonstrated convincingly that Diggle and Goodyear were in error in their location of the end of Book IV and the start of Book V. In the absence of a widely available edition of the poem with the revised line numbers, however, I have deferred to conventional book and line numbering as a mercy to the reader. For the same reason, I have continued to refer to the poet as 'Corippus', despite Riedlberger's persuasive suggestion that the manuscript evidence prefers 'Gorippus'. This may well be correct, but the small scholarly tradition that exists around Corippus conventionally refers to him by that name, and consistency and clarity seem of particular importance if he is not to be buried even further in obscurity.

The same principles have determined my usage of proper names, ethnonyms and toponyms, both ancient and modern. Names have been

transmitted in a range of different forms in the extant texts – not least as a result of transliteration into (and from) Latin, Greek and the various languages spoken in late antique Africa – and have often changed further as they are rendered by contemporary scholars into Arabic or into modern European languages. Where common anglophone forms exist, I have used these (thus, Carthage, Justinian, Belisarius, Procopius and – as noted – Corippus); where modern conventions vary, I have tried to be consistent (Lepcis Magna, Guntharith, Antalas, Laguatan, Cusina). In some cases, different names are deliberately used for the same figure, depending on their status. Thus, Stotzas as the historical rebel as he appears in Procopius and the historical sources, but Stutias as he appears in the *Iohannis*. I have generally given the ancient place names where known, and the modern Arabic toponyms where these can be identified with confidence. In many cases, the locations mentioned in the *Iohannis* remain elusive, and these issues are acknowledged in the discussion.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the work that followed would not have been possible without the extraordinary support of many institutions, colleagues, friends and family. I am grateful to many people who have read and commented upon this work as it developed. Doug Lee, David Mattingly, Neil Christie, Paul Roche, Aaron Peltari and the anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press all read the book in its entirety, and it has been much improved from their suggestions and criticism. Robin Whelan, Simon Loseby and Dave Edwards all read multiple chapters (often multiple times) and were crucial to helping me formulate different arguments as they developed. For specific help on particularly knotty research questions, and for listening patiently to my incoherent ramblings over the past few years, I would also like to express my great thanks to: Dan Stewart, Nikki Rollason, Ollie Harris, Jamie Wood, Naoise MacSweeney, Conor Whately, Greg Hays, Ine Jacobs, Mark Rawlinson, Cori Fenwick, Gavin Kelly, Lisa Fentress, Anna Leone, Philipp von Rummel, Andy Morrison, Richard Miles, Bruce Hitchner, Mary Harlow, Sarah Knight, Jonathan Conant, Anne Rogerson, Roland Steinacher, Kai Francis, Matt Doyle, Laura Smith, Michael Wuk and Eric Blaum.

Ideas and arguments within this book were first outlined and presented to audiences in conferences and seminar talks at Leicester, Lincoln, Rethymno, Tubingen and (in very embryonic form) Dumbarton Oaks: I am grateful to many people present at each for their comments and criticisms. Additionally, several aspects of this discussion were explored initially (and sometimes in more depth) in a range of articles, book

chapters and handbook contributions over the past few years. Full details of these publications can be found in a typically self-aggrandizing section of the bibliography, and need not be repeated here. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the editors and reviewers associated with these works for their help and patience, particularly Bruce Hitchner, Valentino Gasparini, Michael Stewart, Miriam Wagner and Philip Rance.

Writing and researching this book would not have been possible without the support of the staff and students of the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester. The bulk of the writing was done during a semester of study leave at the end of 2021, and I am grateful for the University and College support that allowed this to happen. Financial support to undertake library research was provided by the Society of Libyan Studies and by John Whitehouse and the Ancient North Africa research group at the University of Sydney, and I am grateful to both institutions for this. Many of the most difficult sections of the text (both my own, and making sense of Corippus') were worked out in the enormously congenial setting of the Gladstone Library in Hawarden. Working there feels like finding the cheat codes to a world of focused writing, and it is highly recommended: the Welsh rarebit is delicious too.

I leave my greatest debts until last. My partner, Julia Farley, has been an endless source of inspiration, stimulation and joy, and this book would have been unthinkable without her. She listened as the ideas contained within it slowly took shape, and supported its author with patience and love, even as she has undertaken far grander (and incomparably more important) projects of her own. In happier times, it would be dedicated to her outright. But I think she knows that.

I first articulated the idea for this book, and made a firm statement that I was going to write it, while in conversation with family members in the sad circumstances of my father's funeral in October 2018. In the tumultuous months and years since – in pandemic lockdown and out of it – Dad was never very far away. An academic (and indeed a Cambridge University Press author) himself, he was very familiar with the joys and frustrations of balancing writing and the other parts of the job, of searching for the *mot juste* while being aware of the looming pile of marking still to be done. Without him as a role model and – until recently – as a source of enormous support and good sense, I could never have been doing a job that I love. I have written elsewhere about books and the process of grief, but this project was an important part of that too. He was in my mind as I planned, considered and wrote this book, and I dedicate it to him with great pride. In every sense this was written in his memory. I miss him.

## *A Note on Abbreviations, Translations and Maps*

The maps in this volume were produced by the author using base maps taken from the Antiquity a-la Carte website, <http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/alacarte>.

References to ancient sources and common works of reference follow the abbreviations in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, the *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* and the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. I have used standard editions for all ancient sources throughout. Where I have used others' translations of texts these are marked in the text and indicated in the bibliography. As noted in the preface, all other translations are my own.

For the convenience of the reader (and at the risk of some redundancy), those abbreviations which are frequently used and which may not be immediately obvious to non-specialists are listed here. I have also noted English translations of primary sources here, where available.

AAA	S. Gsell. 1911. <i>Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie</i> (Algiers and Paris).
Agathias	Agathias, <i>Historiae</i> , ed. R. Keydell. 1967. <i>Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque</i> (Berlin); trans. J. D. Frendo. 1975. <i>Agathias. Histories</i> (Berlin).
AL S/R.	<i>Anthologia Latina</i> , ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. 1982. Teubner (Stuttgart); ed. A. Riese. 1894. Teubner (Leipzig). In deference to convention, poems are referred to by both the Shackleton-Bailey (AL S) and Riese (AL R) numbers.
<i>Anth. Pal.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i> , ed. and trans. W. R. Paton. 1916–18. Loeb. 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
Apoll. Rhod. <i>Argon.</i>	Apollonius Rhodius. <i>Argonautica</i> , ed. and trans. W. H. Race. 2009. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).

## Athanasius

- Apol. ad Const.* *Apologia ad Constantium*, ed. G. Opitz. 1941. *Athanasius Werke II.1* (Berlin), trans. M. Atkinson and A. Robertson. 1892. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY).
- Contra Gentes*, ed. and trans. R. W. Thompson. 1971. *Athanasius. Contra gentes, and, De Incarnatione* (Oxford); trans. E. P. Meijering. 1984. *Athanasius, Contra Gentes* (Leiden).

## Augustine

- Conf.* *Confessiones*, ed. L. Verheijen. 1981. CCSL, 27 (Turnhout); trans. S. Ruden. 2017 (New York).
- De Civ Dei.* *De Civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb. 1955. CCSL, 47–8 (Turnhout); trans. H. Bettenson. 1972. *St Augustine. City of God* (Harmondsworth).
- De Div Daem.* *De Divinatione Daemonum*, ed. J. Zycha. 1900. CSEL, 41 (Vienna); trans. E. Hill, R. Kearney, M. G. Campbell and B. Harbert. 2005. *Augustine. On Christian Belief* (New York).
- Ep.* *Epistulae*, ed. A. Goldbacher. 1895–1911. CSEL, 34 (Vienna); trans. W. Parsons, 1951–89. *Augustine. Letters*. 6 vols. (Washington, DC).

## Avitus

- Carm.* *Carmina*, ed. R. Peiper. 1883. MGH AA 6.2; trans. G. W. Shea. 1997. *The Poems of Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus* (Tempe, AZ).
- Barrington* R. J. A. Talbert (ed.) 2000. *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton, NJ).
- CCSL* *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*.
- Chron Gall.* *Chronica Gallica A*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1892. MGH AA, IX (Berlin); ed. R. Burgess. 2001. ‘The Gallic Chronicle of 452. A New Critical Edition’, in R. W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (eds.), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul. Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot), 52–84; partially trans. A. C. Murray. 2000. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough), 77–84.
- Chron Pasch.* *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf. 1832 (Bonn); trans. M. Whitby and M. Whitby. 1989. *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, TTH, 7 (Liverpool).

- CIL VIII G. Wilmanns and T. Mommsen (eds.) 1881. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum vol VIII. Inscriptiones Africae Latinae* (Berlin).
- CJ *Codex Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger. 1954. *Corpus Juris Civilis*, vol. 2. 11th ed. (Berlin); ed. B. W. Frier, trans. F. H. Blume. 2016. *The Codex of Justinian. A New Annotated Translation*. 3 vols. (Cambridge).
- Claud. Claudian, *Opera Omnia*, ed. and trans. M. Platnauer. 1922. Loeb (Cambridge, MA); trans. N. W. Bernstein. 2023. *The Complete Works of Claudian* (London).
- Coll Av *Collectio Avellana*, ed. O. Guenther. 1895. CSEL, 35 (Prague).
- Corippus  
*Iust.* *In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris*, ed. and trans. A. Cameron. 1976. *Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris Libri IV* (London).  
*Pan Anast.* *Panegyricus in laudem Anastasii*, ed. and tr. A. Cameron. 1976. *Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris Libri IV* (London), 34–6.
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*.
- Diod Sic. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, ed. and trans. C. H. Oldfather, R. M. Geer and C. L. Sherman. 1933–70. Loeb. 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Dracontius  
DLD *De Laudibus Dei*, ed. and trans. (French) C. Moussy and C. Camus. 1985–8. Budé (Paris).  
*Rom* *Romulea*, ed. and trans. (French) J. Bouquet and É. Wolff. 1995–6. Budé (Paris).
- Epiphanius  
*Adv Haer.* *Adversus Haereses*, trans. F. Williams. 1987–93. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*. 2 vols. (Leiden).
- Eusebius  
*Theoph.* *Theophania*, trans. (German) H. Gressmann. 1904. *Eusebius. Theophanie* (Leipzig).



Evagrius

- HE *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier. 1898. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia* (London); trans. M. Whitby. 2000. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, TTH, 33 (Liverpool).
- Hdt. Herodotus, *Histories*, ed. and trans. A. D. Godley. 1920. Loeb. 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Hom. *Il.* Homer, *Iliad*, ed. and trans. A. T. Murray. 1924. Rev. W. F. Wyatt. 1999. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Horace ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. 1926. *Horace. Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*. Loeb (Cambridge, MA), 442–89.
- Inst Just.* Justinian, *Institutiones*, ed. T. Mommsen and P. Krüger. 1928. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 1. 16th ed. (Berlin); trans. P. Birks and G. McCleod. 1987. *Justinian's Institutes* (London).
- Ioh* *Iohannis*. For the editions of this work and translations consulted, see the Bibliography.
- Ioh Bic. John of Biclarum, *Chronicon*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1894. MGH AA, XI (Berlin); trans. K. B. Wolf. 1991. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, TTH, 9 (Liverpool), 61–80.
- Ioh Lyd *De Mag.* John Lydus, *De Magistratibus*, ed. and trans. A. C. Bandy. 1982. *Ioannes Lydus. On Powers* (Philadelphia, PA).
- Isid.  
*Hist Goth (LR)* Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum* (Long Recension), ed. and trans. (Spanish) C. R. Alonso. 1975. *Las Historias de los Godos, Vandalos y Suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla* (Léon); trans. K. B. Wolf. 1991. *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, TTH, 9 (Liverpool), 81–110.
- Jord. *Rom* Jordanes, *Romana*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1882. MGH AA, V.1 (Berlin), trans. P. Van Nuffelen and L. Van Hoof. 2020. *Jordanes. Getica and Romana*, TTH, 75 (Liverpool).

- Jul Hon. Julius Honorius, *Cosmographia*, ed. S. Monda. 2008. *La Cosmographia di Giulio Onorio. Un excerptum scolastico tardo-antico* (Rome).
- Juvencus Juvencus, *Libri Evangeliorum libri quattuor*, ed. J. Huemer. 1891. CSEL 24 (Prague); trans. S. McGill. 2017. *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels* (London).
- Lactantius, *Instit.* Lactantius, *Epitome Institutionum Divinarum*, ed. E. Heck and A. Wlosok. 1994. Teubner (Stuttgart); trans. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey. 2003. *Lactantius. Divine Institutes*, TTH, 40 (Liverpool).
- Livy Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, ed. and trans. B. O. Foster, F. G. Moore, Evan T. Sage and A. C. Schlesinger. 1951–67. Rev. J. C. Yardley. 2018. Loeb. 14 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Luc. *BC* Lucan, *Bellum Civile*, ed. and trans. J. D. Duff. 1928. Loeb (Cambridge, MA); trans. S. H. Braund. 2008. *Lucan. The Civil War* (Oxford).
- Lucr.,  
*De Rer. Nat.* Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, ed. and trans. W. H. D. Rouse. 1924. Rev. M. F. Smith. 1992. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Macrob. *Sat.* Macrobius *Saturnalia*, ed. and trans. R. A. Kaster. 2011. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Malalas John Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf. 1831 (Bonn); trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott. 1986. *Byzantina Australiensia*, 4 (Melbourne).
- Marc Com Add. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon* (anonymous addenda), ed. and trans. B. Croke. 1995. *The Chronicle of Marcellinus. A Translation and Commentary* (Sydney).
- Mart. Cap. Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. J. Willis. 1983. Teubner (Leipzig); trans. W. H. Stahl, R. Johnson and E. L. Burge. 1977. *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts. Vol. II. The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (New York).

- Merobaudes *Pan.* Merobaudes *Panegyric*, ed. and trans. F. M. Clover. 1971. *Flavius Merobaudes. A Translation and Historical Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA).
- MGH AA Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi.
- Nemesianus, *Cynegetica*, ed. and trans. (French) P. Volpilhac. 1975. Budé (Paris).
- Not Dig. Occ.* *Notitia Dignitatum Occidentalis*, ed. O. Seeck. 1962. *Notitia Dignitatum. Accedunt Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae et Latercula Provinciarum* (Frankfurt).
- Nov. Just.* Justinian, *Novellae*, ed. R. Schoell and W. Kroll. 1970. *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 3. 15th ed. (Berlin); trans. D. Miller and P. Sarris. 2018. *The Novels of Justinian. A Complete Annotated English Translation*. 2 vols. (Cambridge).
- Ovid
- Ars Am* *Ars Amatoria*, ed. and trans. J. H. Mozley. 1929. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1979. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Met* *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. F. J. Miller. 1916. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1977. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Tr.* *Tristia*, ed. and trans. A. L. Wheeler. 1924. Rev. G. P. Goold. 1988. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Pan Lat.* *Panegyrici Latini*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors. 1964. *XII Panegyrici Latini* (Oxford); ed. and trans. C. E. V. Nixon and B. Saylor Rodgers. 1994. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley, CA).
- Parthemi<sup>us</sup> *Resc ad Sid* Parthemi<sup>us</sup>, *Rescriptum ad Sigisteum*, ed. K. Buechner. 1982. *Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum* (Leipzig), 201.
- PL* *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*.
- Plin. *HN* Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham. 1938. Loeb. 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA).

- PLRE II J. R. Martindale (ed.) 1980. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume II. AD 395–527*. 2 vols. (Cambridge).
- PLRE III J. R. Martindale (ed.) 1992. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume III. AD 527–641*. 2 vols. (Cambridge).
- Plut., *Alex.* Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, ed. and trans. B. Perin. 1919. *Lives. Vol. VII*. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Priscus Priscus, *Fragments*, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley. 1983. *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire, vol. II* (Leeds), 222–377.
- Procopius
- Buildings* *Buildings*, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- BG, BP, BV* *Wars* (*BP* = *Wars* 1–2; *BV* = *Wars* 3–4; *BG* = *Wars* 5–8), ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb. 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA); rev. trans. A. Kaldellis. 2014. *Prokopios. The Wars of Justinian* (Indianapolis, IN).
- SH* Procopius, *Secret History*, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing. 1914. Loeb (Cambridge MA); rev. trans. A. Kaldellis. 2010. *Prokopios. Secret History with Related Texts* (Indianapolis, IN).
- Prop. Propertius, *Elegies*, ed. and trans. G. P. Goold. 1990. Loeb. (Cambridge, MA).
- Prosper, *Chron.* *Prosperi Tironis epitoma chronicon*, ed. T. Mommsen. 1892. MGH AA, IX (Berlin); partial trans. A. C. Murray. 2000. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough), 62–76.
- Prudentius *Opera Omnia*, ed. M. P. Cunningham. 1966. *CCSL* 126 (Turnhout); ed. and trans. H. J. Thompson. 1949. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
- Pseudo Dionysius of Tel Mahre, *Chronicle*, trans. W. Witakowski. 1996. *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre Chronicle. Part III*, TTH, 22 (Liverpool).

- Ptol. *Geog.* Ptolemy, *Geography*, ed. C. F. A. Nobbe. 1966. *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* (Hildesheim).
- Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomeric*, trans. A. James. 2007. *Quintus of Smyrna. The Trojan Epic. Posthomeric* (Baltimore, MD).
- Sedulius,  
*Carm Pasch.* *Carmen Paschale*, ed. J. Huemer. 2007. *CSEL*, 10 (Vienna); trans. C. P. E. Springer. 2013. *Sedulius. The Paschal Song and Hymns* (Atlanta, GA).
- SEG* *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.
- Serv *In Aen.* IV. Servius, *In Aeneidem* IV, ed. A. F. Stocker and A. H. Travis. 1965. *Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum*. Vol. III (Oxford); trans. C. M. McDonough, R. E. Prior and M. Stanbury. 2002. *Servius' Commentary on Book IV of Virgil's Aeneid* (Mundelein, IL).
- Sid Ap *Carm.* Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina*, ed. and trans. W. B. Anderson. 1936. Loeb (Cambridge, MA).
- Sil. Ital. *Pun* Silius Italicus, *Punica*, ed. and trans. J. D. Duff. 1934. Loeb. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA).
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*'I Sing of Things That Are Not Unknown'*  
*Epic and History in Byzantine Africa*

The first appearance of North Africa in Corippus' *Iohannis* is horrifying. John Troglita, the hero and protagonist of this epic, has been despatched from Constantinople by the emperor Justinian to relieve a beleaguered region. Storms, demonic visions and memories of the great conflicts of the past have marked his journey across the Mediterranean, before the African coast finally comes into view:

At last the commander looked out at the shores of the burning land, and recognised there the reins of untameable Mars: nor was the portent in any doubt, for the flames bore witness to the truth. The winds raised spirals of flame that curled at their peaks, and the ashes, mixed with smoke flying beyond the stars, scattered tiny sparks into the highest heavens. Now the fire surged into the middle of the sky, engulfing every tree in the burning land. The ripe crops burned in the cultivated fields, and every tree strengthened the fire that fed on its branches until they crumbled, consumed, into ashes. The wretched cities fell, as their citizens were slaughtered and, with their roofs swept away, all the walls were engulfed in flames.<sup>1</sup>

This striking image of a war-torn land would have evoked a range of responses in both John Troglita and the audience of his poem. John himself – who was a historical figure as well as an epic hero – had been to North Africa before, in rather different circumstances.<sup>2</sup> In 533, some thirteen years before the action described in the *Iohannis*, he had taken part in the conquest of Vandal North

<sup>1</sup> *Ioh* I.323–35: *prospexit tandem succensae litora terrae | ductor et indomitas Martis cognouit habenas | nec dubium (nam uera ferunt incendia) monstrum: | uoluebant uenti crispantes uertice flammās | et fumo commista uolans super astra fauilla | scintillas tenues summam spargebat in aethram. | surgit et in medium feruet iam flamma profundum, | omnia conuoluens succensae robora terrae. | uiritur alma seges cultos matura per agros, | omnis et augescit crescentem frondibus ignem | arbor et in cineres sese consumpta resoluit. | uertuntur miserae caesis cum ciuibus urbes | cunctaque direptis conflagent moenia tectis.*

<sup>2</sup> *PLRE* IIIA Ioannes 36 surveys his biography with the relevant sources. *Jord. Rom* 385 is the only attestation of the cognomen Troglita, which may indicate an origin in Trogilos in Macedonia. See *Proc. BV* I.ii.6–10 (who implies that he came from Thrace and distinguishes him as 'brother of Pappos'), Partsch (1879), xxv and Riedlberger (2010b), 257.



Africa under the great imperial commander Belisarius. This campaign had steamrolled the Vandal kingdom of Carthage in a matter of weeks and integrated the rich provinces of Africa Proconsularis, Byzacium, Numidia and Tripolitania into Justinian's eastern empire.<sup>3</sup> The victory provided the springboard for the invasion first of Sardinia and Sicily, and then of mainland Italy and southern Spain in the years that followed.<sup>4</sup> John would have looked back on this earlier campaign with mixed feelings. His brother Pappus had been killed during the initial stages of the expedition, and grief at this loss surfaces at a later moment in the poem, but John had also won glory in the fighting.<sup>5</sup> He held an important military position in the government of the region and was subsequently posted to a senior command on the eastern front in the ongoing war with Sassanid Persia.<sup>6</sup> When John returned to North Africa at the head of a new expedition, then, it was to a territory that he knew quite well.

The same image of a burning African landscape would have meant something rather different to an educated reader (or listener) of the *Iohannis*. For such an audience, the idea of a hero landing on the African coast after a difficult Mediterranean crossing would inevitably recall the arrival of Aeneas and his refugee Trojans on the coast of Carthage at the beginning of Virgil's great *Aeneid*.<sup>7</sup> The vivid description of Africa in grief – of sparks from a funereal flame creeping towards the sky and a hero lost in personal lamentation – added another layer which recalled the same hero's departure from Carthage. At the end of *Aeneid* IV, the shunned Queen Dido casts herself onto a burning pyre when she hears that her lover has departed for Italy; in the opening lines of the following book, we find Aeneas 'looking back at the walls lit up by flames' from the deck of his ship before he turns back to Italy and his destiny.<sup>8</sup> In Roman tradition, Dido's great sacrifice set in chain the events that led to the Punic wars between Rome and Carthage which determined the destiny of the Mediterranean world. In presenting John's landing in the way that he does, Corippus succinctly links his hero to Aeneas, his poem to the *Aeneid*, and the conflict that he narrates to the seismic struggles of antiquity.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the occupation. <sup>4</sup> Evans (1996), 126–82, provides an overview.

<sup>5</sup> *Iob* I.390–404. His position as a provincial *dux* is implied in *Iob* I.469–72.

<sup>6</sup> *Proc. BP* II.14.12 and *Iob* I.52–109.

<sup>7</sup> *Virg. Aen* I.157–79. The degree to which audiences could pick up literary inter-texts (especially when a poem was delivered verbally) has been much debated. See Schindler (2009), 53–5, for a thoughtful case that a privileged proportion would certainly have recognized many of them (and enjoyed the erudite game). Schubert (2019) is an important recent treatment of the same issue with Dracontius' poetry.

<sup>8</sup> *Virg. Aen* IV.663–705; V.3–4 *moenia respiciens, . . . conlucent flammis*. Vinchesi (1983), 131–2, also notes the linguistic echo here of *Aen* XII.672 (which may have been less obvious to his audience).

John's bleak panorama would perhaps have had the greatest effect on the very earliest audience of the *Iohannis*. Corippus was a North African, and he most certainly composed the work for an audience in Carthage in the immediate aftermath of John's campaign, probably in 549 or 550. The poet repeatedly alludes to the triumphal procession granted to the general and places his epic within the general celebratory atmosphere of that time, but the sufferings of the earlier period still lingered in the memory.<sup>9</sup> The prologue suggests that the work was intended to be recited in public, although it is possible that this performance was limited to the opening book, which is the most obviously panegyric in tone.<sup>10</sup> Whatever form this took, for those Carthaginians who heard his poem in the hours of its first performance, this burning African landscape was not simply a stage for heroic action nor an abstracted epic setting, but evocation of a real world that they could remember all too well. John's landing had taken place just four or five years before, in the late summer of 546. The general had come into a region which had been battered repeatedly by frontier wars, military mutinies, civil conflict and administrative incompetence in the years that followed Belisarius' first landing; it had been struck by a plague in 543 and had probably suffered further from a succession of poor harvests in the following years.<sup>11</sup> Even the Church could offer only limited solace: although African Catholic clerics had warmly welcomed the imperial conquest of 533/4, the collision of Greek and Latin orthodoxies over the next decade led to bitter disputes which were to continue for the rest of Justinian's reign, and which threatened the proud theological independence of Carthage and the surrounding regions.<sup>12</sup> Against this grim setting, John's military victories stood out even more starkly. They offered a respite from a succession of ills and promised brighter days ahead, but the upheaval that had come before was not easily forgotten.

The *Iohannis* is an extraordinary historical resource. In a little under 5,000 lines, Corippus records the military campaigns John Troglita undertook against hostile 'Moorish' or 'Berber' groups between 546 and 548. This fighting stretched across the imperial provinces of Byzacium and Tripolitania – now southern Tunisia and north-western Libya – and John was ultimately victorious, but few observers outside the region seem

<sup>9</sup> *Ioh* Proem and I.1–7. Riedlberger (2010), 83–9, is the most convincing discussion of the circumstances of delivery. The triumphal themes in the poem are discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>10</sup> Hofmann (1989), 373, n. 7 and (2015), 109.

<sup>11</sup> These events – and Corippus' account of them – are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 6.

to have taken much notice. The Greek historian Procopius, for example, whose text is very full on earlier episodes of North African history, mentions John's campaigns only in passing and implies that they were of little significance to the balance of power in the region; our other literary sources, including most contemporary chronicles, simply omit the victories entirely from their accounts.<sup>13</sup> Even modern discussions of the Byzantine army rarely linger for long on these brush wars in a forgotten corner of the empire, but the *Iohannis* elevates them to a heroic scale.<sup>14</sup> To do this, Corippus revived the genre of Latin 'historical' epic – a literary form which had been moribund for more than 400 years – and made the daring move of presenting very recent events in the bold colours traditionally reserved for mythic events or the battles of the distant past. Yet even as he presented John and his imperial troopers as the new *Aeneadae* – the sons of Aeneas – Corippus reflected on the uneasy state of the African provinces that they had come to save and which he and his audience recalled all too well.<sup>15</sup> His poem sings of 'battle standards, commanders and fierce barbarians', but also examines the unhappy months and years which had preceded John's arrival and which are known in only fragmentary form in our other sources. Conspicuously, Corippus is frequently ambivalent in his treatment of the recent past, in which his own lived experiences in a war-torn province run contrary to any seamless message of imperial success which the authorities in the imperial capital might have preferred. Yet there is celebration here too, and it is the reconciliation of these disparate themes in an archaic literary form that makes the *Iohannis* such a thrilling and challenging text to study.

The present book is an exploration of Corippus' *Iohannis* in all of its complexity. It is also a study of the early years of Byzantine Africa and the place of Latin poetry – and specifically Latin *epic* – within that world. As the multilayered story of John's landing reveals, this is a text that must be considered from a range of different perspectives simultaneously: it is at once a work of history, of literature and of social memory. All of these aspects were interdependent, and together they can reveal a great deal about the febrile political and social world of mid-sixth-century Carthage.

<sup>13</sup> Proc. *BVII*.28.46–52 outlines the campaigns and suggests that peace was won at high cost. Jord. *Rom* 388 is more positive (but even briefer). On Procopius, see especially Cameron (1985); Brodka (2004), 14–151; Kaldellis (2004) (and his discussion of the *Vandal War* in Kaldellis (2016)). Greatrex (2014a) provides a survey, and see now the collected papers in Meier and Montinaro (2022).

<sup>14</sup> See most recently Whitby (2021), 198–200; Heather (2018), 250–1. The otherwise excellent study of Koehn (2018) only uses Corippus to discuss the adoption of throwing spears by the imperial cavalry at pages 133–7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ioh* I.8.

Importantly, the long narrative of the *Iohannis* is filled with valuable detail on the changing military fortunes of the region, its political convulsions and the complex social world within which John and his contemporaries acted. This was a messy business – of wars of conquest, internal political squabbles and corruption – but the poem illustrates unusually well the shifting political environment within which Corippus and his audience lived. If Corippus' *Iohannis* was written in part to celebrate imperial military victory (and it certainly was), it remained the work of an African author who remembered all too well the difficulties of the earlier period and the suffering that government incompetence had caused. The *Iohannis* is also our single most important textual source on Moorish North Africa – on the groups against whom John fought, and (no less importantly) those who were crucial allies in his campaigns. The epic preserves names of individuals and groups, hints at social, political and religious practices across the African frontier regions, and on occasion attempts to contemplate the unfolding chaos from the perspective of the Moors themselves. That it does all of this in epic verse adds to the difficulty of the historian's task, but reveals a great deal. Corippus' choice to present his long battle sequences in the stylized form of Homeric or Virgilian warfare mitigates his value as a source on the events that unfolded on the battlefield, but still tells us a great deal about the conception of this recent war in the imagination of contemporary Carthage. Similarly, while modern historians may fume at the ease with which Corippus switches between seemingly trustworthy sources on the Moorish world and the archaic ethnographic language of earlier epic, this too is profoundly revealing about Carthaginian attitudes to 'peripheral' groups. The form of the *Iohannis* – quite as much as its content – will be central to our investigation.

### Corippus: Poet and Poem

The author of the *Iohannis* is an elusive figure, and little is known of him beyond the few clues we can gain from his extant works. His full name is conventionally rendered as Flavius Cresconius Corippus on the strength of one (now lost) manuscript, but even this is less secure than we might wish. Peter Riedlberger has noted that 'Gorippus' is probably a more accurate reading of this manuscript, but the more familiar name will be preferred here if only to defer to convention (and avoid confusion).<sup>16</sup> He was certainly North African in origin: he is identified as an *africanus*

<sup>16</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 28–33, and Riedlberger (2015).

*grammaticus* (upper-level school teacher) in a medieval catalogue, and identifies with the region throughout his work.<sup>17</sup> In the poem to the *Iohannis*, he directly addresses the prominent men (*proceres*) of Carthage, and he dwells at length on the sufferings of Africans in the bleak years before John's arrival.<sup>18</sup> In the same passage, he presents himself as a rustic poet ill suited to such a grand setting, having 'previously recited my songs in the countryside', but this is more likely to have been a modesty topos – or a Virgilian affectation – than a confession of rural origins.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Corippus seems familiar with the landscape of the provincial hinterland, and it has been suggested that his detailed descriptions of the city of Iunci in Byzacium hint that he came from there, but this remains speculative.<sup>20</sup> All that can be said with confidence is that the *Iohannis* was written in Carthage in the very late 540s or early 550s, and that the poet enjoyed some connections with the movers and shakers within that city.

As an African, Corippus was one of the last products of a great flourishing of Latin learning in the western empire. Two generations before him, Blossius Aemilius Dracontius had composed a range of Christian and secular poetry in Vandal Carthage, but had been imprisoned for his troubles.<sup>21</sup> Other poets had also blossomed in and around the Vandal court from the middle of the fifth century, writing panegyrics, dedicatory poetry, epigrams and shorter works, many of which have been preserved in a compilation of the early Byzantine period known as the *Latin Anthology*.<sup>22</sup> The imperial authorities well recognized the value of this cultural tradition at the time of the occupation. In spring 534, Justinian established stipends for two *grammatici* and two rhetors to be kept on the provincial staff, and many other men of letters found professional opportunities in the newly imperial territories.<sup>23</sup> Corippus' contemporaries included the Christian poet Verecundus of Iunci (who makes a cameo appearance in the *Iohannis*), a generation of prolific theologians and innumerable jobbing poets who cheerfully celebrated imperial building projects across the region in Latin

<sup>17</sup> Compare for example *Laus* I.18–21; Kaster (1988), 261–3; Tommasi Moreschini (2009a), 94–5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ioh* Proem 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ioh* Proem 25–6: *quondam per rura locutus . . . carmina*. Virgil's 'progression' from the pastoral *Eclouges* through the *Georgics* to the *Aeneid* is a likely point of reference here.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron (1982), 20; Blaudeau (2015), 125; compare Lassère (1984).

<sup>21</sup> Wolff (2015) is a clear introduction. Pohl (2019) is an excellent compilation of recent work on the poet with a full bibliography.

<sup>22</sup> The nature of relations between the African poets and the Vandal kings has been much debated. Compare Chalon and colleagues (1985); Clover (1986); George (2004); Miles (2005); Vössing (2019); Wolff (2019).

<sup>23</sup> *CJ* I.27.1.42.

doggerel.<sup>24</sup> But Corippus was perhaps the most successful of this generation. The performance of the *Iohannis* brought him to the attention of a new circle of patrons, including John and the dignitaries of the eastern capital. We have no details of his next movements, but within fifteen years, the poet had made his way to Constantinople, where he composed and performed at least two other works, both of which have survived.<sup>25</sup> The shorter is the preface to a panegyric to Anastasius, who held office as both Quaestor of the Sacred Palace and Master of Offices in the imperial capital. The praise poem which these verses introduced has since been lost, but it is likely that Corippus composed similar works for other patrons.<sup>26</sup> His only other extant work is the *In Laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, a formal celebration of the new emperor Justin II in four books, written to honour his accession in 566.<sup>27</sup> Both Constantinopolitan poems allude to Africa, and perhaps hint at the status Latin writers from that region enjoyed in Greek-speaking Constantinople.<sup>28</sup> Corippus has also been plausibly connected with the ‘Cresconius’ who wrote a number of poems on explicitly religious subjects which were held in the early medieval monastic library at Lorsch, but which have not survived.<sup>29</sup>

The mysteries of Corippus’ life pale in comparison to the challenges posed by the *Iohannis* itself. Almost every aspect of the epic poses scholarly problems, from the transmission of the text to its density of literary allusions, which work like a funhouse mirror of the Latin poetic tradition. The full text survives today in just one manuscript, Trivultianus 686: this was a copy made by the Arezzo poet Giovanni De Bonis in the late fourteenth century and rediscovered in 1814 in the library of the Trivulzio family just outside Milan.<sup>30</sup> De Bonis was somewhat slapdash in his transmission, but was evidently sufficiently inspired by his African forebear to infuse several of his own compositions with Corippian imagery.<sup>31</sup> A second copy of the poem was identified in the Korvin library in Buda in the early sixteenth century by Giovanni Cuspiniano, who copied down the incipit and the first five lines of

<sup>24</sup> Hays (2016) paints a vivid portrait of these writers.

<sup>25</sup> Baldwin (1978), Cameron (1980) and Hofmann (2015) provide contrasting reconstructions of Corippus’ life. Compare also Kaster (1988), 261–3.

<sup>26</sup> Corippus, *Pan Anast.* Cameron (1976).

<sup>27</sup> Corippus, *Iust.* Cameron (1976); Antes (1981). Stache (1976) is the standard commentary.

<sup>28</sup> Compare for example *Pan Anast.* 36–40; *Iust.* Pref 35–6; I.18–20; IV.215–16. On the status of North African Latinists in Justinian’s empire (which was not always positive), see Merrills (2022b), 393–4 (with references).

<sup>29</sup> Hofmann (1989) is the best discussion.

<sup>30</sup> Lo Conte (2012) discusses the circumstances of discovery and early publication. This is a useful survey of the different manuscript traditions.

<sup>31</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2015).

Book I. This is the only manuscript which gives the poet's full name, but it is now lost.<sup>32</sup> Around twenty lines from the *Iohannis* have also been identified in another manuscript of the fourteenth century, the so-called Florilegium Veronense, and were edited by Gustav Lowe in 1879.<sup>33</sup> Two library catalogues from the monastery at Monte Cassino record a copy of the poem among their holdings in the eleventh century, which was still there in the fifteenth, but this too has since been lost. The text preserved by De Bonis is just under 4,700 lines in total, but includes several significant lacunae of unknown length, which include the final lines of the poem. Although the eventual resolution of John's campaign is never in doubt (the opening lines of the poem identify what follows as *victoris . . . festa carmina* – 'festive songs of victory' – and the reader is repeatedly reminded of the coming success, as we shall see), the final section of the *Iohannis* is missing from Trivultianus 686 and it is not completely clear where the narrative ended. It is likely that the poem closed with John's final victory of 548, but it may have extended to include the celebration of his triumph.<sup>34</sup> Manuscript traditions variously identify the work as the *Iohannis* ('Poem of John' or 'Johniad'), or the *De Bellis Libycis* ('On the African War') and state that it was seven or eight books in length. Scholars concur that eight books is the correct length, although they have not always agreed on the exact division.<sup>35</sup> These (many) problems aside, we can at least be confident that the bulk of Corippus' epic has survived, albeit in a form that continues to pose challenges for scholars.

Editorial work on the *Iohannis* has been extensive since the rediscovery of De Bonis' text at the start of the nineteenth century. Pietro Mazzucchelli first identified the work and published it, and his edition was adapted by Immanuel Bekker for the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*.<sup>36</sup> Further editions were produced in the last decades of the nineteenth century by Joseph Partsch (for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*) and Michael Petschenig, both of whom drew extensively on the work of their predecessors.<sup>37</sup> In 1970, James Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear produced a collaborative edition of the text for Cambridge University Press,

<sup>32</sup> Lo Conte (2012), 310.    <sup>33</sup> Lowe (1879).    <sup>34</sup> This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> This is clearest in the case of the end of Book IV and the start of Book V. Caramico and Riedlberger (2010) convincingly argue that IV.597 in Diggle and Goodyear's edition should be the opening line of Book V. This is also followed by Goldlust (2017). For the numbering used in the present study (which follows Diggle and Goodyear for convenience), see the remarks in the prolegomena.

<sup>36</sup> Mazzucchelli (1820); Bekker (1836). On these editions, see especially Lo Conte (2012), 301–34.

<sup>37</sup> Partsch (1879); Petschenig (1886).



which has since provided the basis for translations of the poem into Spanish, French and English.<sup>38</sup> Editorial work continues: editions, translations and commentaries on individual books have been systematically published, including those by Maria Assunta Vinchesi (Book I: in Italian), Vincent Zarini (Book II: French), Chiara Tommasi Moreschini (Book III: Italian), Benjamin Goldlust (Book IV: French) and Peter Riedlberger (Book VIII: German).<sup>39</sup> The depth of this scholarship testifies to the complexity of the editorial problems posed by Corippus, not least as he is known to us through the distorting lens of De Bonis, and the publication of each new edition has typically thrown up a cloud of additional smaller publications, comments and amendments. Editors have particularly wrestled with Corippus' treatment of unusual toponyms and ethnonyms, few of which fit easily within Latin hexameters as the poet confessed, and many of which are unique to the poem.<sup>40</sup> Corippus' Latin is also a challenge: although the poet was evidently deeply immersed in Virgil and saw himself as the true heir to the earlier tradition, scholars have differed over the degree to which his idiosyncrasies should be 'corrected' to reflect this sensibility.<sup>41</sup> Heroic editorial work over the past two centuries has done a great deal to place study of Corippus on firm foundations, but treacherous areas remain, particularly for the unwary.<sup>42</sup>

### Epic Background

In composing a historical epic, Corippus was the conscious heir to a long tradition of Greek and Latin writing. The *Iohannis* was a poem which told of 'the deeds of kings and leaders and the sorrows of war' in the famous formulation of Horace, and did so to the martial beat of the Latin

<sup>38</sup> Diggle and Goodyear (1970). Shea (1998) (English); Ramírez Tirado (1997) (Spanish); Dideren (2007) (French).

<sup>39</sup> Vinchesi (1983); Zarini (1997); Tommasi Moreschini (2001a); Goldlust (2017); Riedlberger (2010). All include fine introductions to the poem as a whole. I have been unable to access Giulia Caramico's recent edition of Book V.

<sup>40</sup> Corippus confesses these difficulties at *Iob* II.25–7. See especially Skutsch (1900), Partsch (1896) and the discussion in Chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> Compare for example the reviews of Diggle and Goodyear's edition by Hudson-Williams (1972) and especially Willis (1973) at 214: 'a good Latinist is in constant danger of correcting the text as if it were a student's copy of verses; he can often make a verse better without much difficulty, but he may not thereby bring it nearer to what the author intended'.

<sup>42</sup> Here I should stress again my gratitude to Aaron Peltari and Paul Roche for their help making sense of Corippus' (sometimes fearsome) Latin.



hexameter.<sup>43</sup> Epic was also defined by the long shadows cast by its earliest and greatest proponents – Homer in the Greek tradition and Virgil in the Latin. In the preface to the *Iohannis*, Corippus signals his deference to both mighty forebears:

The bard of Smyrna described strong Achilles in song, as did the learned Virgil Aeneas. John's achievement taught me to describe his battles and report his deeds for those yet to come. John surpasses Aeneas in valour, but my song is unworthy of Virgil.<sup>44</sup>

Corippus tips his cap to Homer (*Smyrnaeus vates*) here, and he may well have known that text in Greek, but it is the *Aeneid* that provides the principal model for the *Iohannis*, and the Trojan hero who is the archetype for the general John.<sup>45</sup> The point is driven home in the opening lines of Book I, which directly evoke Virgil's famous 'I sing of arms and the man' (*arma virumque cano*), at the start of his own poem. These lines present the epic that follows as an almost involuntary response to John's heroism and the urging of the muses:

I sing about banners and leaders, fierce peoples and the destruction of war, about the betrayal and slaughter of men, and their hard labours; about disasters in Libya and of enemies broken by might, of the hunger men had to endure and of the waters denied, thirst which confused both armies with deadly tumult; I sing of peoples confused, laid low and subjugated, and of a leader who sealed these deeds with a great triumph.<sup>46</sup>

This deference to Virgil was no simple affectation in the literary world of late antique Africa. Whether or not he was a teacher, Corippus would have been intimately familiar with the works of the poet from his own days in the schoolroom, and this would have been shared by much of his audience. A century and a half earlier, the adventures of Aeneas had such a profound

<sup>43</sup> Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 73–4: *Res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella quo scribi possent numero, monstravit Homerus.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ioh*, Proem. 11–16: *Smyrnaeus uates fortem descripsit Achillem, | Aeneam doctus carmine Vergilius: | meque Iohannis opus docuit describere pugnas | cunctaque uenturis acta referre uiris. | Aeneam superat melior uirtute Iohannes, | sed non Vergilio carmina digna cano.* Compare Virg. *Ec.* IV.3, VIII.9–10; IX.35–6 on the 'worthiness' of performing works in the aftermath of others, and Stat. *Theb.* XII.816–19 for a similar conceit. I am grateful to Paul Roche for these observations.

<sup>45</sup> Pace the remarkable observation of Nissen (1940), 298, that Corippus was an essentially Greek poet, and 'only Latin in language' (*der nur in der Sprache lateinisch sei*). Antès (1981), XXXIII–V, n. 3 discusses the evidence for Corippus' knowledge of Greek.

<sup>46</sup> *Ioh* I.1–8: *signa duces gentesque feras Martisque ruinas, | insidias stragesque uirum durosque labores | et Libyca clades ac fractos uiribus hostes | indictamque famem populis laticesque negatos, | utraque letifero turbantes castra tumultu, | turbatos, stratosque cano populosque subactos, | ductorem et magno signantem facta triumpho[.]*

effect on the young Augustine that his own *Confessions* is unmistakably shaped by the narrative of the Trojan wanderer in search of his true homeland, and generations of educated Latin speakers had similarly come to see the world through the filters Virgil provided.<sup>47</sup> Many late antique poets worked still more directly with the poet, even composing original poems ('Virgilian centos') consisting entirely of lines and phrases drawn from his work and repurposed to new poetic ends.<sup>48</sup> Virgilian verses were endlessly sampled and repurposed in everything from occasional graffiti to Christian sermons. These tags might have been intended to display a writer's erudition, or provoke a frisson of recognition within the audience, but might also reflect his foundational role in the development of Latin as a language, just as Shakespeare and the King James Bible do in modern written English (or as *The Simpsons* and internet memes do in everyday speech). For Corippus and writers of his tradition, Virgil provided both a framework for comprehending the world and the language to make sense of it.

Corippus used Virgilian elements to magnify the accomplishments of his hero John as well as his own poetic status. Nor was he above spelling out these allusions for his audience. Close evocations of Virgilian scenes are quite common in the poem, as we have already seen in the description of John's first glimpse of the African landscape. Elsewhere, these connections are made even more explicitly. As John's fleet sails past the site of Troy on its voyage from Constantinople to Carthage, for example, the crews aboard ship reflect at length on the marvellous battles fought on the site, but it is left to John's son Peter to articulate the precise connection between the poetic past and the heroic present, and his own place within this genealogy:

The illustrious Peter heard them talking of battles. When he heard the brilliant name of the boy Iulus, he burned in his boyish heart with an new desire to read, wishing to know about those wars. He was stirred by great piety: he thought of himself as Ascanius [and] his mother as Creusa: she was a king's daughter, his mother too was a king's daughter. Aeneas was Ascanius' father, and his father was now the famous John.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Aug. *Conf.*, I.13–14 and *De Civ. Dei.* XVIII.16. Hardie (2019) is a gripping treatment of Virgil's influence in late antiquity. MacCormack (1998) is essential on Virgil's influence on Augustine, and 1–49 is a clear introduction of the poet's importance in the later period. See especially 89–90 and 96–7 on the Virgilian structure of *Confessions*. Wills (2010) is also a helpful overview.

<sup>48</sup> McGill (2005); Pelttari (2014), 73–114.

<sup>49</sup> *Ioh.* I. 197–203: *audiit egregius narrantes proelia Petrus. | audiit ut pueri praeclarum nomen Iuli, | arsit amore nouo pectus puerile legendi, | noscere bella uolens. magna pietate mouetur: | se putat Ascanium, matrem putat esse Creusam. | filia regis erat: mater quoque filia regis. | tunc pater Aeneas, et nunc pater ipse Iohannes.*

By advertising his debts to Virgil at the outset of his poem, Corippus reveals the foundations of his own epic clearly. Like the *Aeneid*, the *Iohannis* is a poem about a hero at war, but in both poems much of the fighting is concentrated in the second half of the epic. The opening books of each trace the voyage of the hero across the Mediterranean and describe the origins of the focal conflict. The second and third books of the *Aeneid* are devoted to a long analepsis (a narrative ‘flashback’), as Aeneas retells the story of the fall of Troy to a horrified audience at the court of Dido; likewise, the third and fourth books of *Iohannis* are dominated by a similar digression which recalls the ‘fall’ of North Africa in the voice of one of its participants.<sup>50</sup> Virgilian themes and motifs are readily apparent on other levels of composition too, from the metaphors which describe the setting of the sun on a bloody battlefield to the epithets which distinguish John and his lieutenants.<sup>51</sup> In telling the story of John, Corippus was also retelling one of the most familiar narratives of the Roman world and reliving it anew.

Virgil was the most important of Corippus’ literary models, of course, but was not his only source of inspiration. In the century after Virgil, a succession of Latin epicists had produced their own variations on this theme, and Corippus knew these works well, lifting scenes, phrases and moments of mood from writers like Ovid, Statius, Silius Italicus and (especially) the Neronian poet Lucan.<sup>52</sup> Each of these writers responded in different ways to the precedents set by Homer, Virgil and the poets who came after them, but this collective process gradually established the boundaries of the genre – what a Latin epic ‘should’ include.<sup>53</sup> Many of these elements are clearly apparent in the *Iohannis* and are constitutive features of its narrative. When Corippus described the sea storm which nearly wrecked John’s fleet in Book I, for example, he did so using language derived from the archetypal passage in *Aeneid* V, but also from the countless tempests that had risen in later Latin epics.<sup>54</sup> We do not know whether John’s fleet actually encountered such a storm during the crossing, but Corippus’ retelling of his story as an epic

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> Blänsdorf (1975) and Lausberg (1989) are essential. Compare Alan Cameron (1967). Tommasi Moreschini (2013a) provides a clear overview.

<sup>52</sup> Corippus’ debts to the poetic tradition are widely noted in Mazzucchelli (1820) *passim* and Amann (1885), as well the modern commentaries of Vinchesi (1980), Zarini (1997), Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), Goldlust (2017) and Riedlberger (2010). On the particular influence of Silius, see especially Delattre (2011).

<sup>53</sup> Hardie (1993) is a vivid introduction to this tradition.

<sup>54</sup> *Ioh* I.271–322; Vinchesi (1983), 126–31, identifies key classical echoes. Lausberg (1989), 117–18, and Bureau (2015), 227, discuss the significance of storm passages in Juvenecus, II.37–42 and Sedulius, *Carm Pasch.* III.62.

demanded it. A similar impulse is apparent in the description of two visits to African oracles by Moorish leaders in Books III and VI of the *Iohannis*.<sup>55</sup> As we shall see, these passages are important sources for studying Moorish paganism in this period (or at least for studying Byzantine attitudes towards Moorish paganism), but they too are indelibly shaped by the epic tradition within which Corippus wrote. The likely inspiration behind both is Aeneas' visit to the Sibylline oracle in *Aeneid* VI, but the language that Corippus uses and the position of each episode in the narrative reveal other debts, most obviously to the visitation of Hasdrubal to the oracle at the start of Silius Italicus' *Punica*, and the bloody prophetic scenes of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.<sup>56</sup>

Viewed in purely literary terms, the *Iohannis* is a tantalizing puzzle which has prompted scholarly work from a range of different perspectives. As a text that has variously been celebrated as 'the last Latin classical epic', or as a crucial bridge between classical poetry and the *chansons de geste* of the medieval period, the *Iohannis* has provided particularly rich pickings.<sup>57</sup> Built as it is from the *spolia* of the classical canon, the text has variously been viewed as the construction of a creative and original architect, a thoughtless imitator barely in control of his material and a canny operative who rapidly composed his epic through the assembly of prefabricated parts.<sup>58</sup> Scholars have examined Corippus' use of specific passages from a range of models, but also the degree to which poetic precedent shaped whole sections of the poem. Studies have scrutinized Corippus' catalogues, oracle scenes, metaphors and (less frequently) battle sequences against this background and consider these texts as the latest in a long chain of Latin epic. As such, they reveal a great deal about Corippus' own education and poetic methodologies, and about late antique learning more generally.

### Epic-Panegyric: A New Form?

Corippus often deviated from the models set by earlier epicists, not least because he composed his poem in the middle of the sixth century, when the political – and poetic – environment had changed significantly. While the

<sup>55</sup> *Ioh* III.81–151; VI.145–87.

<sup>56</sup> Zarini (1996). These passages, their literary antecedents and their value for understanding Moorish religious practices are discussed further in Chapter 6.

<sup>57</sup> See for example Manitius (1891), 407–8: 'the last representative of the ancient way in the south, at a time when the north had long since run wild' (*letzter Vertreter der antiken Richtung im Süden zu einer Zeit, als im Norden schon längst die Verwilderung eingetreten war*). And compare Romano (1966–7); Schindler (2009), 10; Zarini (2006), 60; Zarini (2010), 101–3.

<sup>58</sup> See (as a representative selection): Zarini (2003) (a skilful combination of panegyric and epic); Willis (1973), 213 ('the poet is a miserable hack'); Riedlberger (2010) (composed from carefully chosen *spolia*).

*Aeneid* and its successors remained central in the educational curricula of the late antique world, Corippus was virtually unique in seeking to compose an extended historical epic of his own, certainly in Latin. In Greek, a secular mythological tradition continued – Quintus of Smyrna continued the *Iliad* in fourteen books, Nonnus of Panopolis created a mythological cycle comparable in scale to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Pisander of Laranda celebrated Alexander the Great in sixty books – but there was little comparable in the Latin world.<sup>59</sup> Instead, western epicists were primarily inspired by explicitly Christian themes. Juvenecus, Sedulius, Avitus and Arator rendered Scripture into formal epic metre, while other poets like Prudentius or Paulinus of Périgueux celebrated the martyrs and confessors of the early church in similarly grand language. This represented nothing less than the invention of a new poetic genre.<sup>60</sup> Where secular epic themes did survive in Latin, this was often in shorter *epyllia* – miniature epics – like those of Dracontius in the late fifth century, which crafted mythological motifs or canonical characters in much smaller settings.<sup>61</sup>

Other poets turned the epic tradition to explicitly political ends and coupled the language and imagery of Homer and Virgil with the conventions of panegyric praise poetry. In itself, this did not represent a great leap: after all, short *encomia* of ruling emperors were relatively common in earlier epics.<sup>62</sup> While modern scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the subversive political subtext of the *Aeneid* or Lucan's *Civil War*, late antique readers rarely seem so troubled and readily drew upon these texts, especially when praising the powerful figures of their own day.<sup>63</sup> In Greek, this deployment of epic seems to have been relatively widespread, although few such works have survived in full. We know, for example, that Eusebius Scholasticus celebrated the battlefield victories of the general Gainas in verse in the late fourth century, but the poem has been entirely lost.<sup>64</sup> An anonymous poet of around the same time composed a *Blemyomachia* in

<sup>59</sup> Whitby and Roberts (2018), 222–5; Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 15–25, for background. Schindler (2009), 31–3 discusses some fragmentary works of the fourth and fifth century.

<sup>60</sup> On this see especially Herzog (1975); Roberts (1985); Green (2006). Hofmann (1987), 213, observes that Corippus' lost works may have included poems of this kind.

<sup>61</sup> On which see Bright (1987) and the studies in Katharina Pohl (2019).

<sup>62</sup> Schindler (2009), 28–9. See for example Virg. *Geo.* 1.24–42; *Aen.* VI.791–805; Luc. *BCI.*33–66; Stat. *Theb.* 1.16–33; Val Flacc. *Argonautica*, 1.7–21. On the fluid boundaries of panegyric as a genre, see Hägg and Rousseau (2000).

<sup>63</sup> Discussed in Rees (2004), 38–44; Ware (2012), 27–30; Ware (2017); Hardie (2019), 75–102. Hardie (1986) is the classic treatment of Virgil's political cosmology.

<sup>64</sup> Soc Schol. *HE* III.21 and VI.6. and see Cameron and Long (1993), 200–1.

praise of one Germanus' successes against the Blemmyes in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, which survives only in a number of tantalizing fragments.<sup>65</sup> John Lydus also claimed to have written an epic in honour of Justinian's victories, which no longer survives.<sup>66</sup> The only substantial extant works of this kind are the works of George of Pisidia, who commemorated several imperial campaigns in verse in the early seventh century.<sup>67</sup>

The most important and innovative of these writers in Latin was certainly Claudian Claudianus, who composed a collection of long poems to honour individuals in the western imperial court at the turn of the fifth century.<sup>68</sup> These included celebrations of the consulships of the Emperor Honorius and the *magister militum* Stilicho alongside vituperations of political rivals, and poems of around 500 lines which describe successful military campaigns against the Goths and the defeat of the African usurper Gildo. These works were explicitly political in focus and were concerned above all with praising the focal figure, often in a ceremonial setting. Quite whether all of this represented the emergence of a new genre of epic-panegyric has been much debated by scholars, however, and it is likely that Claudian saw himself as an epicist rather than a proponent of a new form.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, his works demonstrate the degree to which poetic conventions were changing in this period and the language of epic deployed in novel ways.

Corippus seems to have known Claudian's writing well, and like the earlier poet incorporated elements of panegyric into his work, but his own combination of these literary influences was unique.<sup>70</sup> This union took rather different form in the *Iohannis* and the more explicitly encomiastic *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, but both betray the traces of their mixed parentage. The celebratory function of the earlier poem is clear from the outset: the prologue presents the *Iohannis* as a contribution to the formal triumphal celebrations which

<sup>65</sup> Livrea (1978) is the standard edition; Steinrück (1999) all of the fragments with further comments from Kanavou (2015). For historical context compare Eide et al. (1998), 1182–5; for poetic context Miguélez-Cavero (2008), 59–60. The poem has variously been attributed to Olympiodorus of Thebes, Cyrus of Panopolis and Claudian, but none is certain.

<sup>66</sup> *De Mag.* III.28; see Lee (2007), 40–2 for an overview. <sup>67</sup> Howard-Johnston (2010), 16–35.

<sup>68</sup> The bibliography is substantial. See especially Alan Cameron (1970) on the political background, Ware (2012) on the poetic aspirations, and now Coombe (2018).

<sup>69</sup> Schindler (2009), 59–172, makes the case for a distinct genre with Claudian as a foundational figure. Her work draws on the earlier observations of Nissen (1940); Estefania Alvarez (1985) and especially Hofmann (1988). Ware (2012), 18–31, rejects this and regards Claudian as an epicist. Compare also the discussion in Gärtner (2008), 26–32.

<sup>70</sup> Amann (1885), 33–7; Appel (1904), 13–14.

marked the end of John's campaign, but does so in a way that demonstrates the poet's aspirations clearly:

I have dared, noble lords (*proceres*), to tell of the laurels of the victor: I will sing festive songs in this time of peace. It pleased me to write about John's greatness in war, about the deeds of the hero that will be read by generations yet to come. For literature makes everything known in this long-lived world as it remembers all the battles of the ancient leaders. Who would know of the great Aeneas, who the harsh Achilles, who the brave Hector . . . if literature did not keep alive the memory of their ancient deeds?<sup>71</sup>

The epic rejoices in the recent successes of a still-living general and frames them as a celebration of the ruling Emperor Justinian. If John is Aeneas in the poem, Justinian is Jupiter: the presiding deity whose will sets the hero in motion and whose benevolent guidance creates order out of chaos. This is made clear at the opening of the first book, in a passage that recalls the victory monuments of Justinian's empire and the formalized rhetoric of victory:

Glorious among them, Justinian, Emperor, arise from your high throne pleased in your triumphs, and as victor dispense laws to the broken tyrants, for your noble soles tread down all kings, and their purple is ready to serve the Roman realm. Yet under your feet the vanquished enemy is laid out, hard cords bind the peoples, and ropes tighten their hands behind their backs with strong knots, their savage necks bend with the weight of their chains.<sup>72</sup>

Explicit as this celebration is, Justinian occupies a relatively minor role within the narrative of the *Iohannis*, and this encomium is tempered substantially after the opening lines.<sup>73</sup> The emperor had never visited Africa and is likely to have been something of an abstract presence to the inhabitants of the region, even those privileged few who were present for the first delivery of the *Iohannis*. But Justinian was notoriously jealous of his status and monitored his successful generals very closely; Corippus' failure to exalt John using the full lexicon of panegyric praise can probably

<sup>71</sup> *Ioh* Proem 1–8, 10: *Victoris, proceres, praesumpsi dicere lauros: | tempore pacifico carmina festa canam. | scribere me libuit magnum per bella Iohannem, | uenturo generi facta legenda uiri. | omnia nota facit longaeuo littera mundo, | dum memorat ueterum proelia cuncta ducum. | qui magnum Aeneam, saeuum quis nosset Achillem, | Hectora quis fortem . . . | littera ni priscum commemoraret opus?*

<sup>72</sup> *Ioh* I.14–22: *has inter medius solio sublimis ab alto, | Iustinianae, tuis, princeps, assurge triumphis | laetus et infractis uictor da iura tyrannis: | inclita nam cunctos calcant uestigia reges | laetaque Romano seruit iam purpura regno | sed pedibusque tuis uictus prosternitur hostis | et gentes fera uincla ligant nodoque tenaci | post tergum implicitas stringunt retinacula palmas, | saeua superpositis plectuntur colla catenis.*

<sup>73</sup> Gärtner (2015), 334, perceptively identifies the *Iohannis* as a narrative epic packaged within a panegyric. Rance (2022), 104, notes that Justinian occupies a similarly ambivalent position – 'at once remote and central' – in Corippus' *Wars*.



be explained as a pragmatic decision as much as anything else.<sup>74</sup> But this is also a reflection of the mixed literary inheritance within which he worked and his literary aspirations. If Claudian used the language of epic in composing his panegyrics, Corippus used elements of panegyric within his own epic. The result was a rather different project which emphasized narrative quite as much as praise. This has important implications for how we should read the poem.

Most historical analyses of *Iohannis* have placed a greater emphasis on its panegyric aspects, and much less on its specific significance as an epic. It is commonly assumed that the primary purpose of the poem was to celebrate John's victories and hence Justinianic rule in North Africa. The *encomia* embedded within the poem, the author's rather bland presentation of John as a pious Christian general, and the wider narrative of imperial victory support the view that the politics of the *Iohannis* are essentially straightforward. Corippus' occasional authorial interjections also add eulogistic comments into the narrative, and it is assumed that the public delivery of the poem served an explicitly political – and panegyric – purpose.<sup>75</sup> This interpretation is supported by some recurrent structural oppositions within the text, which have been much discussed in the scholarship – of the contrast, for example, between Christian regiments of order and victory on the Roman side, and the pagan hordes of chaos and abject defeat on the Moorish.<sup>76</sup> In two influential articles, Averil Cameron established this position and argued that the *Iohannis* was specifically intended as a celebration of imperial power during a period of religious conflict.<sup>77</sup> From the mid-540s, certain prominent members of the North African church had opposed imperial doctrine during the so-called Three Chapters controversy, when Justinian attempted to fashion a theological orthodoxy across his extended empire. Cameron regarded the *Iohannis* as a counterpoint to these escalating tensions – an assertion of provincial loyalty through the medium of classical epic, which might inspire loyalty among the African population in turn.<sup>78</sup> This influential reading presents the *Iohannis* as a spectacular piece of imperial propaganda, written for the nervous inhabitants of Africa by one of their number. In this view, the praise of both Justinian and John, and the thanksgiving for

<sup>74</sup> Consolino (2015), 193.    <sup>75</sup> Schindler (2009), 239; Gärtner (2015), 332–4.

<sup>76</sup> See especially Tommasi Moeschini (2002a) and Zarini (2010).

<sup>77</sup> Cameron (1982), 12–33; Cameron (1984).

<sup>78</sup> Cameron (1982), 16: 'He was consciously writing not only to please the Byzantine rulers, but to persuade the local population of the Byzantine case, at a time when such persuasion was urgently needed, not only to justify the military situation, but also to assist the reception of Justinian's unpopular attempts to enforce eastern orthodoxy.'



military victory, were not simply a statement of gratitude, but a reminder that the inhabitants of imperial Africa should themselves be thankful.

Cameron's work has been crucial in focusing scholarly attention on the historical agency of the *Iohannis* as a text and the social circumstances of its composition, and not simply viewing it as a literary curiosity or as a source of information to be plundered, but her emphasis on its panegyric function risks neglecting its particular status as a work of *epic* specifically. Corippus was the first Latin poet for generations to produce a historical epic on this scale, and his work all the more unusual for presenting the events of the very recent past at such length.<sup>79</sup> Each of these factors indelibly shaped its representation of the world and of the position of the empire within it. In consciously producing an epic, Corippus was certainly making an extravagant cultural statement about Roman power in Africa, but did so in a medium which imposed certain narrative demands of its own – and which opened up areas for imaginative interrogation which would have been inaccessible in other literary media. The precise rhythms of Corippus' narrative differed in some ways from the earlier proponents of the form, but it remains striking that there are central elements of the *Iohannis* which are utterly without parallel in contemporary panegyric modes.<sup>80</sup> The rich description of John's first view of the African coast is a reminder that Corippus' image of Byzantine Africa could often be unsettling, and the poem was as likely to provoke a raft of contradictory responses in its audiences as it was to commit to a whole-hearted celebration of imperial power. We see much the same thing in the long and extraordinarily violent battle sequences which dominate the latter part of the *Iohannis* and comprise around one fifth of its total length. This stylized but relentless bloodshed was a commonplace of Latin (and Greek) historical epic, but rarely surfaced at all in panegyrics, where battles are more commonly euphemized and bloodless.<sup>81</sup> Corippus' contribution to this

<sup>79</sup> Many earlier Latin epicists had certainly responded to recent historical events in their work, and Nethercut (2019) demonstrates effectively that such works were the rule rather than the exception (and that even 'mythological' epics had important historiographical aspects). Compare also Schindler (2009), 32–4; Leigh (2008), 995; Westall (2014), 39–43. Yet it remains important that the canonical models available to Corippus are likely to have been concerned primarily with events in the distant past (with the partial exception of Lucan).

<sup>80</sup> Compare Schindler (2009), 231–8 (acknowledging that Corippus is more 'epic' than other poets in her study). On Corippus' narrative (especially in comparison to earlier historical epics), see especially Hofmann (1988), Hajdú (2001), and the discussion in Chapter 3.

<sup>81</sup> Menander Rhetor, II.373–4, does suggest that battle sequences could be part of panegyric, but not as a central feature. The few extant examples are very short. Compare *Pan Lat* IV.29.5–6; Claud., *I Stil* 10–115, *VI Hon* 210–21; Merobaudes *Pan* I. Fr IIB 16–24; *Pan* II 148–55. There is nothing comparable to the very long *aristeiae* of Corippus. On these, see Schindler (2007) and (2009), 253–72 (arguing for epic elements with panegyric sensibility). This is explored further in Chapter 5.

visceral poetic tradition has been the subject of some debate, but the precise context in which he did this – namely in the post-war environs of an exhausted Carthage – deserves further attention.

These themes are magnified still further in the long historical analepsis which dominates Books III and IV of the *Iohannis*, in which the poet recalls the recent history of imperial North Africa in the voice of a subaltern soldier called Liberatus. Narrative 'flashbacks' of this kind were a commonplace of classical narrative, but are anomalous in praise poetry. Working on the assumption that Corippus' intentions were essentially panegyric, many commentators have been content to assert that this analepsis presented the Byzantine past in essentially laudatory terms – that it celebrated a 'golden age' of imperial Africa before the rebellious Moor Antalas came along and ruined everything.<sup>82</sup> In fact, Liberatus presents a much more unstable account of the period from 533 to 546 which does celebrate moments of peace (and Moorish aggression), but which places a far greater emphasis on imperial incompetence and infighting and directly addresses the culpability of the Africans in the disasters which they faced. Corippus complicates this image still further with the addition of competing narratives, which interpret the same events from the perspective of the Moorish commander Antalas, John Troglita, and (briefly) the assembled populace of Carthage.<sup>83</sup> This exploration of narrative modes was standard enough in the epic tradition, but provided Corippus with a medium for interrogating the recent past that would have been unavailable in other genres.

### 'To Grant the Conquered Clemency and Crush the Proud in War'

A more subtle illustration of the complexity of the epic inheritance is apparent in a trope which would initially seem to lend itself well to the demands of panegyric or encomium.<sup>84</sup> In the opening book of the *Iohannis*, Justinian despatches John Troglita to Africa with the following commands:

Hold well to the ancient laws of our ancestors: lift up the weary and destroy the rebellious. The love of piety defines us: to grant clemency to all those who are subject; the honour of virtue: to tame those peoples who are proud.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Compare for example Zarini (2010), 100: 'Certains problèmes cruciaux ne peuvent évidemment pas être totalement occultés par le poète panegyriste . . . . Mais ces nuances restent exceptionnelles.'

<sup>83</sup> These narrative overlays are analysed in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>84</sup> Lausberg (1989) is fundamental on this borrowing.

<sup>85</sup> *Ioh* 1.146–9 *tu prisca parentum | iura tene, fessos releua, confringe rebelles. | hic pietatis amor, subiectis parcere, nostrae est, | hic uirtutis honor, gentes domitare superbas.*

In Book II, John invokes these instructions when he demands that the rebellious Moorish leader Antalas surrender:

But the emperor [Justinian], acting mercifully, prefers everything to belong to him so that he might hold, save, and rule all people, lifting up those subject to him and crushing the proud with his strength.<sup>86</sup>

The principal inter-text in both of these passages was certainly the famous couplet which comes at the end of the parade of Roman heroes in *Aeneid* VI – a natural enough point of reference in a scene which was profoundly Virgilian. Here, Anchises advises his son Aeneas of Rome's imperial destiny, (in the elegant translation of Shadi Bartsch):

You, Roman, remember your own arts: to rule  
The world with law, impose your ways on peace,  
Grant the conquered clemency, and crush the proud in war.<sup>87</sup>

Corippus returns to this refrain multiple times over the course of the *Iohannis* and reinvents the mantra in his own terms. The motif is explicitly invoked twice more in the exchange of embassies between John and Antalas, first later in Book II, and then when the Roman ambassador returns from his mission in Book IV.<sup>88</sup> Two further passages apply the principle to John's negotiations with friendly Moorish leaders. In Book VI, representatives of the Astrices themselves invoke the Virgilian couplet in asserting their deference to imperial rule, and John does the same when riding to the aid of his beleaguered ally Cusina in the final book of the epic.<sup>89</sup> Echoes of the same passage can be heard throughout the *Iohannis* as a recurrent leitmotiv.<sup>90</sup> As Marion Lausberg and Maria Assunta Vinchesi have argued, Corippus' deft reworking of the refrain elsewhere marries the Virgilian contrast of *superbi* and *subiecti* with the Christian opposition between *humiles* (humble) and *superbi*, and hence partially reframes the famous Latin motif within a Christian mode.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Ioh* II.366–8: *sed princeps clementer agens sic omnia mauult | esse sua, ut cunctos, saluetque habeatque regatque, | subiectos releuans, frangens uirtute superbos.*

<sup>87</sup> Virg. *Aen* VI.851–3. *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento | (hae tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem, | parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.* Tr. Bartsch (2020), 148.

<sup>88</sup> *Ioh* II.374–6 (and cf. II.357–60); IV.343–8.

<sup>89</sup> *Ioh* VI.425–6; VIII.461–4. On these passages, see Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>90</sup> Stache (1976), 310–11, compiles a useful table of these allusions in both the *Ioh* and the *Laus*.

<sup>91</sup> Lausberg (1989), 110; Vinchesi (1983), 107. See, for example. 1 Peter 5:5; 'God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace' (*Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam*), and compare Luke 1:51.

These allusions complement the panegyric function of the *Iohannis*, of course, and might be read simply as a neat display of poetic virtuosity to political ends, but within the context of Corippus' epic the refrain has rather different implications, not least because the sheer scale of the poem allows the theme to be explored in depth. Over the course of his work, Corippus articulates a view of Roman imperial power defined by the collaboration of the willing *subiecti* – which could include provincials like himself, as well as barbarian groups – quite as much as by the imposition of the force of arms. This was something new.<sup>92</sup> Corippus' interrogations of the opposition between *superbi* and *subiecti*, and the role of both 'the proud and the subject' in the unfolding narrative of Rome's destiny, often come at precisely the moments when these distinctions are blurred. John invokes the principle when he needs to distinguish between trusted allied Moors and those barbarians who were in revolt: it is only with the help of the former that the latter can be suppressed.<sup>93</sup> It is the same motif which allows the commander to separate blameless provincial Afri from the rapacious rebel Mauri: his job is to defend one and defeat the other.<sup>94</sup> This proved a particularly helpful distinction in the face of the complex realities of the early occupation: Corippus' view of this political calculus was not neutral, but the epic form allowed him to probe this sensitive issue. As a citizen of the newly imperial African provinces, now ruled by a Greek-speaking elite and sustained by an army drawn from across the ancient world, Corippus might be regarded as a spokesman for the willing *subiecti*, and perhaps regarded the subject peoples as a constitutive elements of the empire.<sup>95</sup> As David Quint has argued, epic was traditionally the poetry of the imperial centre – the foundational song of victory and triumph – but Corippus' was a work written from the periphery and hence a Latin contribution to a polyglot empire.<sup>96</sup>

The present study argues that the *Iohannis* was inherently political in its positioning, but that its overt celebration of John's military success should not distract us from the simmering problems within imperial North Africa which the epic frequently acknowledges. In its own way, the *Iohannis* slung a giant 'Mission Accomplished' banner across the streets of Byzantine Carthage, but it did not obscure entirely the reality behind this celebration.

<sup>92</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 381–2, raises this point, but maintains that the *Iohannis* was still essentially panegyric in function.

<sup>93</sup> *Ioh* VI.425–6; VIII.461–4. Indeed it could be argued that the use of the motif in the extended exchange with Antalas is intended to do the same thing.

<sup>94</sup> *Ioh* II.337–9, 344–9. <sup>95</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 381–2.

<sup>96</sup> Quint (1992), especially 1–34. The connections between the *Aeneid* and Augustus' political programme in particular have been extensively interrogated. See Hardie (1986).

As many commentators noted at the time, when George W. Bush did this during a notorious photo shoot on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* after the fall of Baghdad in 2003, he buried countless social, political and economic difficulties under a hubristic statement of military success. In its way, the *Iohannis* sought to do much the same thing, claiming that a spectacular victory over barbaric foes had brought a period of sustained social chaos and internecine conflict to an end. This was a recasting of the imperial project in the teleology of epic. As we might expect, this often resounded to the wider glory of Justinian's project: it placed that emperor alongside Augustus, Jupiter and Christ as a presiding figure in the political firmament, and the conquests of his rule as the realization of a Roman destiny centuries in the making. But the *Iohannis* also ran contrary to established narratives at times. The battles won by John in the African hinterland were not the simple victories euphemised in contemporary panegyric or the well-ordered manoeuvres of classicizing historiography, but bloody, brutal struggles of muscle, metal and sinew marked by dust, tears and severed limbs. Corippus' accounts of the recent past also differed greatly from the well-worn talking points of the imperial chancellery. There was no space here for the miraculous salvation of Africa from the heretic Vandals – that group is presented surprisingly fondly in the poem – and much more emphasis on civil discord, squabbles between incompetent bureaucrats and the profound suffering caused by plague. The conventions of epic granted Corippus the space to explore these themes, and the way he did so provides invaluable material for historical study. Corippus gives us a perspective on the recent North African past and the experience of imperial occupation that we do not find so clearly anywhere else: this was a view that remembered the later Vandal period with some nostalgia, which regarded the Byzantine invasion of 533/4 as a new chapter in an ongoing struggle rather than a single moment of liberation, and that recognized the complexity of the interactions between the 'Moorish' barbarians and the many representatives of imperial power, both legitimate and illegitimate.

Another group lived in North Africa around the year 550, of course, one which may have responded to Corippus' account of John's landing in a range of ways. The main narrative of the *Iohannis* is concerned with imperial victories over the 'Moors', but it is hard to know what individuals identified as such would have made of the poem. It is likely that some would have been willing participants in the triumphal celebrations: as we shall see, allies like Cusina, Ifsdaias and (later) Iaudas were crucial to John's military effort, and are acknowledged as such in Corippus' long poem.<sup>97</sup> All had risen to

<sup>97</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

prominence in the cultural melting pot of late Vandal and early Byzantine Africa, and some may have enjoyed a classical education of their own. Others, like Antalas, had once enjoyed a similar privilege but had fallen out of favour and would have found themselves as the trophies of John's parade, rather than on the side of the victors. They too may have understood the outline of Corippus' poem, but are unlikely to have sympathized with its wider message. But, in reality, most 'Moors' in this period would have known little of poetic posturing in the streets of Carthage, and would have cared less. This too is important to remember. Corippus provides us with a view from the provincial capital of imperial Carthage, set in a rigid and classicizing frame. Unexpected as it may be in many of its details, it is not a definitive portrait of North Africa in this confusing period, but it deserves to be taken seriously nevertheless.

### **The Structure of the Present Book**

Chapter 2, 'Prelude to a War', addresses the history of Byzantine Africa from the first occupation in summer 533 to John's landing in 546. This is an unusually well-documented period in the history of late antique North Africa, thanks to the survival of the edicts which established imperial rule in the region, a range of archaeology and epigraphy which testify to the transformation of the region's civic government, and a number of literary sources (including Corippus' *Iohannis*). Chief among these sources are the two books of Procopius' *Vandal Wars*, a long history of the campaigns in North Africa, which were part of his eight-book classicizing history of the Wars of Justinian's reign. Procopius describes the collapse of the Vandal kingdom and periodic imperial campaigns against the Moorish groups of Numidia, Byzacena and Tripolitania, but much of his account is given over to detailed narratives of a succession of military mutinies and plots which took place across the region. This account is frequently confusing and is complicated still further by additional passages in his panegyric *Buildings* (Book VI of which describes Justinian's building programme across North Africa), and his notorious *Secret History*, which lends a scandalous sheen to the events recounted in *Wars* (and often contradicts the longer account).

This early occupation of North Africa is typically presented in modern scholarship as a steady consolidation of imperial rule in the face of resistance from Moorish barbarians in the first instance and recalcitrant African churchmen in the second. This traditional view has shaped the reading of the *Iohannis* and its intended function quite profoundly. This chapter argues that the principal challenges to imperial rule in Africa came from

within the administration. This was manifested most clearly in a series of mutinies and revolts within the army, leading ultimately to a coup, probably in early 546, in which a senior Roman commander named Guntharith seized authority in Carthage. That many of the leading figures in the administration seem to have come to terms with this tyrant testifies to the weaknesses within the imperial system, and to the challenges which faced John at the time of his landing around six months later. Guntharith's coup was merely the latest in a long series of crises, all of which generated new problems across the wider frontier region. This chapter briefly explores the nature of relations between frontier commanders and their 'barbarian' neighbours, many of whom aspired to office within the imperial system. It suggests that the 'Moorish' crisis which John faced in 546 (and which had smouldered for three or four years by that stage) was the direct consequence of internecine struggles within the imperial system, as allies increasingly acted in their own interest.

Chapter 3, 'Past and Future in the *Iohannis*', considers the underlying narrative structures of Corippus' epic and how the poet positions the campaigns of John Troglita in their wider context. The chapter first returns to the early Byzantine period, discussed in Chapter 2, and assesses how the events of circa 530–546 are presented in the *Iohannis*, particularly in Books III and IV. These books are dominated by a long analeptic 'flashback' in the voice of a North African officer named Liberatus, which purports to explain the origins of the recent troubles to John but which is then complicated by shorter surveys of the same events from the perspective of different characters. Although Liberatus explicitly states that his intention is to ascribe the collapse of African order to the Moorish leader Antalas, his narrative presents a much less straightforward picture than has sometimes been supposed. As a succinct verse history of North Africa between the late 520s and 546, Liberatus' account differs wildly from contemporary imperial propaganda. He ascribes the collapse of the Vandal kingdom to Moorish pressure rather than the imperial reconquest, and indeed laments the end of a privileged period in African history. While he goes on to present the earliest years of the Byzantine occupation as an idyllic period, a latent violence remains within it, and much of his narrative is given over to military mutiny, war and civic unrest. It is clear from both emphasis and omission that Liberatus (or Corippus) was keen to exculpate certain prominent figures from their role in this crisis, but the narrative cannot be read as an exoneration of the imperial administration. This sense is magnified by the addition of further historical perspectives on the same event, including that of Antalas.



This chapter argues that these passages must be considered as meaningful responses to the recent past within Byzantine Africa, and as functional parts of the *Iohannis*. It is suggested that Corippus' presentation of these counter-narratives in different voices created a space for the examination of a complex past which would otherwise have been unavailable to him. By articulating the disquiet of Roman Africans at recent upheaval (through Liberatus), and Moorish vitriol at imperial hypocrisy (through Antalas), Corippus could acknowledge different aspects of the recent past without directly championing them. John Troglita's summary narrative of the same period concludes this troubling section of the *Iohannis* by reframing these events in more positive terms, but much of this work is left to be done in the remainder of the poem.

The second part of the chapter looks at the proleptic passages in the *Iohannis* – those moments when Corippus' narrative moves from the narrated time of John's campaigns to their anticipated resolution and the composition of the epic itself. As noted, the *Iohannis* was closely connected to the triumphal celebrations which marked John's victories, and the prospect of this happy conclusion underpins the text as a whole. Significantly, this teleology is not only explored through many direct references to the coming triumph, but also to the counterfactual 'futures' anticipated by the Moors. In the two prophetic digressions of Books III and VI, the Moors are presented with accounts of the future which they choose to interpret in terms that are positive to themselves. Corippus' resolution of these accounts through authorial interjections (and the interpretative glosses of John Troglita) helps to underscore the inevitability of imperial victory while emphasizing the sense of crisis within the historical narrative.

The later chapters of the book are focused on particular themes within the *Iohannis*, and consider the poem's value as a historical source. Chapter 4, 'Corippus and the Moorish World', addresses the shifting representation of African groups within the poem. Studies of Corippus' ethnography have tended either to present the text as an example of imperial chauvinism, which contrasts lawful Christian Romans with their chaotic pagan enemy, or to plunder the poem for discrete points of information without full acknowledgement of their literary setting. Although both approaches have had important results, they oversimplify the complex interplay of literary and historical elements within the *Iohannis*. More significantly, they neglect the very prominent role played by 'Moorish' allies within John's campaigns in North Africa, and Corippus' emphasis upon them. If the poet wished to denigrate the defeated barbarians, he also needed to find space for the loyal allies upon whom this success depended.



This chapter examines the different lenses through which Corippus represented the Moorish world. It looks first at the many terms used by the poet to refer to all of the ‘Moorish’ groups within North Africa – ally or enemy alike. It suggests that Corippus’ wide deployment of this language was intended to accentuate the complexity of John’s task, not simply in defeating the ‘innumerable peoples’ arranged against him, but also in incorporating others within the imperial programme. His campaign was successful, this implies, precisely because the general did not regard the African world in simple binary terms.

It then considers the specific ethnonyms within the *Iohannis* and addresses their value for our understanding of North Africa in this period. Following the work of Yves Modéran, it notes that Corippus evidently distinguished between the ‘Moorish’ inhabitants of the Roman provinces and the groups who lived on or beyond the frontiers, particularly in Tripolitania and Syrtica. Where Modéran suggested these distinctions were absolute, however – on the ground and in the mind of the poet – I argue that certain forms of identity in this period may have transcended the ordered ethnography beloved of modern commentators. Corippus’ poem may well indicate that the ‘Laguatan’ identity (preserved in many forms in the *Iohannis*, but unique to the poem) may well have been much more fluid than has previously been acknowledged, and incorporated a range of different groups, regardless of their origins.

The chapter closes with a discussion of the long ‘catalogue of tribes’ which opens Book II of the *Iohannis*, and which has been central to many modern reconstructions of the Moorish world of the sixth century. It is argued that this catalogue was intended to evoke the final triumphal ceremony which marked the conclusion of John’s campaigns in 548. This connects the opening of the Moorish war to its eventual resolution – and hence connects directly to the proleptic themes explored in Chapter 3. No less important, it also reveals the cognitive assumptions which underpinned imperial views of the Moorish world from Carthage. This was not an ordered ‘map’ of tessellating tribal groups (however much modern commentators would love to have such a thing), but was instead an image of a diverse – but ultimately subjugated – world.

Chapter 5, ‘For Every Blade Was Red’, examines Corippus’ accounts of military activity in the *Iohannis*, and particularly his use of startlingly violent imagery. The *Iohannis* is our only extended narrative account of the Justinianic army on campaign in North Africa. It provides important details regarding military strategy and organization in the region, even if these are sometimes difficult to rescue from the thick soup of epic

mythologizing. The first part of this chapter discusses the likely sequence of John's campaigns in 546, 547 and 548. Certain conclusions are drawn regarding the size of John's army, its constitution and the strategic goals that he followed, as well as Moorish fighting practices in the same period.

The second part of the chapter considers the long battle accounts within the *Iohannis* and the political function that they may have had. Stylized combat sequences were a very common feature of Greek and Latin epic, and Corippus proved an adept continuator of this tradition. His accounts are broadly orthodox in form and follow established practice in attempting to add new and increasingly visceral imagery to the poetic repertoire. In large part, this may be explained simply as a demonstration of the writer's literary ambitions, but it is argued that violent imagery of battle was also a means to address the ambiguities of 'Moorish' identity discussed in the previous chapter. The moment of battle clarified loyalties – and hence identities – in a manner that was not otherwise possible. The extraordinarily violent imagery accentuated this process, essentially transforming the 'good' Moors into heroes (and so comparable to their Roman allies), and the 'bad' into abject and dismembered body parts. If the *Iohannis* was intended to reconstitute the body politic in North Africa, it frequently did so in an unusually literal manner.

The final chapter, 'Christianity and Paganism in the *Iohannis*', considers religious themes. It explores first the Christian underpinnings of the text and notes that the *Iohannis* rested on religious assumptions even as it used the imagery and rhetoric of classical epic to recount an essentially secular narrative. It then examines specific Christian details and what they reveal about the contemporary tensions within the region. Although several modern commentators have argued that Corippus retained a pointed silence regarding the ongoing Three Chapters controversy, and intended his poem to counterbalance the seething theological tensions of the period, this reticence may have been overstated. The epic includes two recognizable portraits of African churchmen who played an important role as spokesmen in the developing crisis. Far from ignoring contemporary religious problems, Corippus may have intended his poem to accentuate the support of the entire African populace for the imperial military programme.

The *Iohannis* is also a unique source for 'Moorish' religious practices in this period. The last section of this chapter looks at the representations of specific African gods in the poem and details of their worship. These passages provide tantalizing material for historical erudition and have often been connected to the fragmentary archaeological and epigraphic evidence for late African paganism, and to a range of textual sources, from

the earliest classical authors to the medieval period. While it is tempting to suppose that Corippus presents a timeless image of Moorish religion, it is clear that the *Iohannis* was very much a product of the mid-sixth century. The poet evidently describes this world through the thick lenses of his literary influences, but the practices that may be identified behind these accounts are strikingly different from those apparent from our other sources. Even ancient gods could be put to new purposes in the changing political and social world of the mid-sixth century. Equally important, Corippus' *Iohannis* was composed at a time when the imperial authorities in Africa were consolidating the recent military victories with a programme of evangelism into the frontier regions, pre-desert and oasis communities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of this programme and of how this changes our understanding of Corippus' text.

### Outline of the Poem

The structure of the *Iohannis* is not particularly complicated, but neither is it absolutely straightforward, especially to readers coming to the poem for the first time. The three principal battles that occupy the last four books of the poem took place over three years (546, 547, 548). These need to be carefully distinguished in the mind of the reader. More important still is the long analepsis that occupies much of Books III and IV, in which the poet explicates the situation in late Vandal and early Byzantine Africa. The tensions and conflicts explored here are historically distinct from those which occupy the remainder of the epic, but are related to them in some important ways, not least for providing the moral context for the battles which follow. Corippus' immediate audience would no doubt have recognized this without difficulty, and appreciated the sometimes subtle slippage between the crises of the past and the present.

To aid the modern reader – and particularly to lay the groundwork for the discussion that follows – a brief outline of the constituent books of the *Iohannis* is presented here.

### *Preface*

The preface is dedicated to the *proceres* (prominent citizens) of Carthage, and it immediately sets the poem in a triumphant (and triumphal) frame. Corippus' ostensible concern here is to set John's deeds alongside those of Achilles and Aeneas, while insisting on his own unworthiness to compose a poem in the manner of Virgil.

## Book I

While Corippus' stated intention is to celebrate Roman victory – and a short celebration of imperial power is included in lines 9–22 – the opening lines of his epic are otherwise surprisingly bleak. The first clear set piece is an image of African suffering: 'Everywhere lamentations sounded, anguished terror coursed through everyone, and everything shaken by dreadful dangers' [*Ioh* I.42–3]; 'Africa, the third part of the world, perished in flames and smoke' [*Ioh* I.47]. Confronted with this suffering, Justinian appoints John as his general and his successes in the Persian Wars are recounted [*Ioh* I.48–109]. John is brought before the emperor and instructed to save the beleaguered region [*Ioh* I.110–58], to 'lift up the weak and destroy the rebellious' [*Ioh* I.147].

The fleet then sets sail; sailors tell one another the stories of the Trojan War as they pass the site of that city [*Ioh* I.159–196], and John's son Peter is sufficiently inspired by this to identify himself with Aeneas' son Ascanius and his father with the Trojan hero [*Ioh* I.197–207]. The fleet sails on to Sicily, passing Scylla and Charybdis without difficulty [*Ioh* I.208–8]. During the night, a storm picks up and John is visited by two visions – first a demonic Moorish figure who taunts the general that he will never cross safely to Africa, and then an angel who inspires him to courage [*Ioh* I.229–70]. The fleet is then beset by a storm, which is overcome by John's sincere prayers to God [*Ioh* I.271–309].

John's first sight of Africa is the war-torn landscape introduced at the start of this chapter [*Ioh* I.323–340]. John then reflects on Belisarius' landing more than a decade earlier, his own role within it, and the death of his brother Pappus during the campaign that followed [*Ioh* I.341–416]. The fleet then lands at Carthage, the troops are immediately assembled and march out from Carthage in nine orderly columns which Corippus compares to a colony of bees. The coming conflict recalls the mythical Gigantomachy [*Ioh* I.417–59]. The army makes its way to Antonia Castra in northern Byzacium, where a messenger from the Moorish leader Antalas threatens John and recalls his own victories over the commander Solomon, as well as those of his people over Emperor Maximian at the end of the third century CE. John remains unimpressed [*Ioh* I.460–508]. As the troops prepare for battle, John instructs his commanders and expounds on the treachery and strategic guile of the Moors. Inspired, the Roman troops applaud the general, bringing the first book to a close on a tense but positive note [*Ioh* I.509–81].

*Book II*

The first contact with the Moors results in a minor victory for the Romans, and Book II opens with the aftermath: the defeated Moors scatter into the landscape [*Ioh* II.1–23]. Almost immediately, however, Corippus describes the regrouping of these Moorish forces and includes a long and detailed catalogue on the leaders and their allies [*Ioh* II.24–161] despite lamenting the difficulty of rendering these names in verse [*Ioh* II.26–7]. This catalogue serves as a first order of battle for the conflict which takes place in Book V and is a pendant to the similar account of Roman forces at the end of Book IV.

Corippus next recounts ongoing skirmishes between the Romans under Geiserith and scattered Moorish groups, using a range of metaphors derived from meteorology and the natural world. Although they fight bravely, the Romans are forced back [*Ioh* II.162–234]. Informed of the Moorish attack, John musters a cavalry force in relief and a storm forces the Moors to retreat. John then sends scouts to reconnoitre the Moorish positions and the Roman camp is established [*Ioh* II.235–87]. John spends a sleepless night worrying about the challenges facing him, especially the need to save the African people from the rebellious Moors. He discusses these anxieties with his adjutant Ricinarius, who advocates diplomacy and piety in an explicitly Virgilian mode: John should spare the humble and subdue the proud. If the general pursues this strategy, no blame can be attached to him should he fail [*Ioh* II.288–354]. Encouraged by this, John sends an ultimatum to Antalas, asserting Roman authority and ordering the rebel's surrender. He speaks disparagingly of Moorish military tactics and religion and of the fate that will meet them [*Ioh* II.355–413]. Following the departure of the messenger, night falls and the contrasting dreams of the two camps are described: the Romans anticipate violent conflict and victory; the Moors fear flight and captivity [*Ioh* II.414–88].

*Book III*

John and his commanders exchange war stories to open Book III. The general asks his tribune Liberatus to explain to him the origins of the current conflict [*Ioh* III.12–62]. Liberatus' account of the earlier history of North Africa takes up the remainder of Book III and much of Book IV. Within the narrative space of the poem, all of this takes place in the evening before the first major battle of the epic, but the historical frame of reference is much wider: it traces the current problems from the turn of the sixth

century and lingers particularly on the last days of the Vandal kingdom (c.529–34 CE) and the crises of the early Byzantine period (esp. c.540–4 CE). The retrospective narrative is conventional in epic, but is justified by John's absence from Africa for most of this period. Nevertheless, much of this would have been familiar to the immediate audience of the *Iohannis*.

The digression opens with an account of the happy state of Africa at the turn of the sixth century, before it was confronted with a 'twin plague' comparable to that suffered in the present [*Iob* III.63–4]. The first part of the analepsis focuses on the Moorish leader Antalas, and opens with a vivid account of his father Guenfan's journey to an oracle at time of his birth. The rites are described in a curious portmanteau of classical epic elements, and the oracle then provides a prophecy which relates the future course of African history, particularly Antalas' part in it [*Iob* III.77–156]. His life is then traced through his youth and early manhood and the gradual escalation from livestock rustling and banditry to all-out war against the Vandals [*Iob* III.156–83]. This culminates with an account of how Antalas' Frexes allied with other groups to end the peace of the Vandal kingdom, first defeating the general 'Hildimer' in an ambush which led to the rise to power of the tyrannical king Gelimer [*Iob* III.183–261]. After lamenting again the 'two-fold plague' of war and tyranny [*Iob* III.269–70] caused by Gelimer's usurpation, Liberatus describes the Byzantine conquest and the return of peace to Africa, with Moorish tribes cowed by the power of the empire [*Iob* III.271–338]. The violence of this occupation is stressed and subsequent struggles with the Moor Iaudas and the rebel Stutias are briefly mentioned – difficulties which may be dated to 535–8 CE [*Iob* III.302–19].

Following a lacuna in the text, the tone of the digression suddenly becomes much bleaker. Liberatus describes first the plague of 543 CE, with massive loss of life, related social upheaval and a striking loss of public piety: 'All forums were thrown open, and painful disputes came forward. Discord raged throughout the world, stirring up savage quarrels. Piety withdrew completely. No-one was compelled by his conscience to pursue justice' [*Iob* III.376–9]. Appalled at this impiety, God withdraws His mercy from the region and Antalas sets about plotting his own conflict against Africa [*Iob* III.343–400]. The Byzantine general Solomon allies with the Moor Cusina to suppress this threat and engages the Moors in combat in a forest. The Byzantine officer Guntarith deliberately flees at a crucial moment and the imperial troops panic. Solomon's death compounds this and the battle is lost [*Iob* 401–441]. During this struggle, the rebel Stutias emerges as the figurehead of this resistance, and by the end of Book III, his

tyranny is established in conjunction with Moorish leaders. The book closes on a grim note with all of Africa seemingly lost [*Ioh* III.442–60].

#### *Book IV*

Following an interjection from Liberatus, Book IV continues his digression on the collapse of Africa into war. He describes first the loss of the city of Hadrumetum in Byzacena, which was betrayed to the rebels through the skulduggery of Stutias [*Ioh* IV.8–59]. Liberatus speaks of his own personal experience as one of the defeated soldiers, first describing the surrender of the city and then his own escape. [*Ioh* IV.60–81].

The imperial cause is offered some hope by the arrival of the new *magister militum* Areobindus, but the division of military authority leads to further fighting [*Ioh* IV.97–8]. The Byzantine commander John, son of Sisiniolus (not to be confused with the hero of the epic, or indeed with the other Johns throughout the text), continues to fight against the Moors with the help of Vandal allies, but recognizes that Stutias poses the more immediate threat [*Ioh* IV.82–135]. John engages with a Moorish army, but the tide turns when Stutias enters the fray, alongside other mutinous Roman troops led by Hermogenes and Taurus. Stutias is killed in the battle and repents his treachery with his dying words [*Ioh* IV.136–218]. John is also killed. Guntharith becomes the leader of the revolt: ‘that evil, deceitful, cursed, dreadful, ill-fated adulterer, bandit, murderer, rapist and foulest agent of war’ [*Ioh* IV.223–4]. This conflict is stopped only by the wisdom of the prefect of Africa, Athanasius, who has Guntharith murdered at a feast [*Ioh* IV.219–42]. Liberatus ends his digression with a general lamentation on the state of Africa, leaving his listeners numbed [*Ioh* IV.243–55].

The *Iohannis* then returns to the narrative present of 546. As dawn breaks, the commanders organize their troops and John prays for support [*Ioh* IV.256–303]. A messenger, Amantius, reaches the army and describes the war council of the Moors, Antalas’ speech to them and their furious response to John’s ultimatum. Antalas insists on his own earlier fidelity to the Roman cause and the imperial betrayal of him – a counter-narrative of sorts to the recent account of Liberatus [*Ioh* IV.304–92]. John then addresses his troops, reminding them of the importance of loyalty within the army and identifying Guntharith and Stutias as illustrations of his point [*Ioh* IV.304–456]. There follows the order of battle of the Roman army, including the Moorish allies Cusina and Ifsidaia [*Ioh* IV.457–563]. The roll call is ended with a description of John and Ricinarius at the centre of the allied line [*Ioh* IV.564–97].

*Book V*

Book V finally turns to the Battle at Antonia Castra in autumn 546, an engagement that has been promised throughout the text to this point. Most modern editions of the poem include the short account of the Moorish preparations for battle at the end of Book IV: first a description of Ierna's circling of livestock into a defensive rampart, followed by a brief recapitulation of the different groups assembled under Antalas [*Ioh* IV.595–644]. As recent scholarship has shown, however, this was probably intended to be the opening of the fifth book.<sup>98</sup>

The two commanders then address one another across the battlefield, and the Moors release a sacred bull which is inauspiciously killed by a Roman spear. Both armies shout their religious affiliations [*Ioh* V.1–49]. A general description of battle follows [*Ioh* V.50–98]. The bulk of the first half of Book V is taken up with *aristeiae* – descriptions of individual heroic combat, many of which are surprisingly violent [*Ioh* V.100–58; 195–223; 240–348; 439–79]. These accounts are punctuated by descriptions of the wider rhythms of battle – of advances and retreats – and of pointed comparisons to epic archetypes. Amidst this, the Roman forces are victorious and John leads an assault on the Moorish camp, slaughtering animals and camp followers [*Ioh* V.392–438, 480–92]. Facing defeat, the Moorish leader Ierna flees with an icon of the god Gurzil, but he is cut down in his flight and the field is left to the Romans [*Ioh* V.493–527].

*Book VI*

Book VI is concerned with the aftermath of the victory described in Book V, and with John's disastrous expedition to the southern frontier regions in summer 547. The triumphal return to Carthage is the focus of the opening part of the book, but this proves a temporary reprieve [*Ioh* VI.1–103]. As the Romans celebrate, Moorish opposition is stirred up again by Carcasan and his son Bruten in the distant Syrtic regions [*Ioh* VI.104–44]. Carcasan consults an oracle which foretells that his actions will lead to a great victory – a prophecy the narrator correctly glosses as indicating Roman success at the expense of the Moors. Carcasan then prepares his forces anew [*Ioh* VI.145–220]. John hears of this and leads an expeditionary force towards Tripolitania, in the hope of ending the campaign before it reaches Africa proper [*Ioh* VI.221–92]. Pursuing the retreating Moors into the

<sup>98</sup> Caramico and Riedlberger (2010).



desert, John and his troops are beset by thirst; John attempts to soothe them by comparing himself to Lucan's Cato [*Ioh* VI.293–343]. The Romans retreat and camp at a river but are cut off from resupply by bad luck [*Ioh* VI.344–90]. John receives ambassadors from a local group called the Astrices and accepts their submission, despite the scepticism of his troops [*Ioh* VI.391–436]. Skirmishers from the Roman and Laguatan armies then encounter one another, and John is persuaded to prepare for battle along a river, despite his own misgivings [*Ioh* VI.437–91]. Battle is started somewhat chaotically. John attempts to maintain defensive lines, but the apparent sight of fleeing Moors leads to an ill-advised attack. The narrator is at pains to exculpate John from responsibility for this mistake [*Ioh* VI.492–550]. Carcasan then attacks the Romans, aided by difficult terrain and the flight of John's Moorish allies [*Ioh* VI.551–606]. Battle is joined. Roman commanders fight heroically, but in a losing cause [*Ioh* VI.607–96]. John attempts to reverse the course of battle, and another leader – John Senior – fights fiercely before losing his life [*Ioh* VI.697–773].

### *Book VII*

John Troglita's defeated army makes its way to an unnamed coastal city, where it takes refuge [*Ioh* VII.1–19]. John and Ricinarius spend a sleepless night discussing first strategy and then the importance of divine support. They agree that Moorish allies are important [*Ioh* VII.20–103]. John encourages his troops and they reassemble at Laribus, a town in Africa Proconsularis [*Ioh* VII.104–49]. Historically, this is where John spent the winter of 547/8 in preparation for another year of campaigning, but this is not made clear in the poem. Meanwhile, news has reached Carthage of the earlier defeat. The widow of John Senior grieves, and the Prefect Athanasius orders the resupply of the field army [*Ioh* VII.150–241].

John's lieutenants resolve tensions between the federate Moorish leaders Ifisdaias and Cusina, and the Romans and their allies assemble [*Ioh* VII.242–80]. Learning of this, Antalas advises Carcasan to feign retreat. John's army gives chase [*Ioh* VII.281–373]. Caecilides/Liberatus (the narrator of Books III and IV) is sent on a scouting mission to the city of Iunci, where the Moors are encamped. He explores the city, engages in a series of skirmishes and takes the Moorish chieftain Varinnus prisoner [*Ioh* VII.374–497]. John then interrogates the Moorish captives and is told by Varinnus of the prophecy that Carcasan received from the oracle of Ammon and of the strategy that Antalas had advised him to pursue.

John explains that the prophecy is misleading and foreshadows only Carcasan's defeat and the deaths of his followers. Varinnus is put to death [*Ioh* VII.498–542].

### Book VIII

The final book is entirely concerned with preparations for the climactic battle and with the engagement itself but is incomplete in the extant manuscript. It opens with an outline of John's strategy – either to engage the Moors outside Iunci, or to outmanoeuvre the Moors from there. Antalas and Carcasan make counter-moves, and John resupplies his troops from the port of Lariscus [*Ioh* VIII.1–48]. John's plans are interrupted by the threat of mutiny among his Roman troops. The narrator laments this treachery and the power of rumour. John is furious and prepares to move with Cusina, Ifisdaias, Bezina and Iaudas against the mutineers [*Ioh* VIII.49–126]. The sight of the allied Moors and the calm of their generals soothes the rebels, and they submit [*Ioh* VIII.127–63].

John moves his reconciled army to the Fields of Cato (Campi Catonis), an unknown location, probably in southern Byzacium. Here, he finds the Moors entrenched and provokes them into open combat [*Ioh* VIII.164–79]. John addresses his troops [*Ioh* VIII.180–223]. Meanwhile, the Moors make their own plans [*Ioh* VIII.224–77]. Night falls. John and Ricinarius spend their time in contemplation and prayer; the Moors sacrifice to their gods [*Ioh* VIII.278–317]. At dawn, the Roman troops pray for victory [*Ioh* VIII.318–69].

After a lacuna in the text, John arranges his troops. Battle is joined and the *aristeiae* start again [*Ioh* VIII.370–427]. Cusina rallies his troops, and John sends reinforcements to his ally [*Ioh* VIII.428–78]. The Roman officer Putzintulus commits himself to the battle, undertaking an *aristeia* and knowingly going to his death. In his final words, he anticipates the triumph to come [*Ioh* VIII.479–509]. Corippus then describes the Roman attack, followed by a lengthy *aristeia* of John [*Ioh* VIII.510–86]. Accounts of the heroic fighting of Ricinarius and others follow [*Ioh* VIII.579–626]. John finally kills Carcasan and the Romans take the field [*Ioh* VIII.627–57]. The last lines of the poem have been lost.

*Prelude to a War*  
*Byzantine Africa 533–546*

When John Troglita arrived in Carthage in the late summer of 546, the challenges he faced were as much political as military. As the flames of war raged through the African hinterland, a political conflagration burned just as fiercely in Carthage. In 533, Belisarius had swept away the kingdom of the Vandals and had imposed a bold new bureaucratic structure on the North African provinces, but just thirteen years later, the systems he had put in place already seemed fragile. The intervening period had witnessed two significant military mutinies and several attempted coups; at their worst, these had seen the majority of imperial forces in Africa take up arms against the state. Civic and military government was crippled by underfunding and the rapid turnover of competent administrators, with the result that the army were rarely promptly paid and the locals felt the burden of forced requisitioning. Simultaneously, disjointed diplomacy led to chaos and a sequence of crises across the imperial territories. Successful military campaigns in Byzacium and Numidia, first in 535 and then again in 539/40, had been offset by reverses since, and the lands under cultivation right up to the walls of Carthage had been subject to barbarian plundering in the summers of 544, 545 and 546. Most seriously of all, perhaps, a series of bad harvests in the late 530s were followed in 542 or 543 by the first great outbreak of bubonic plague in the region, which had a devastating effect on African society.

These disasters had dramatic political repercussions, which divided the loyalties of the local civic and military elite, and even left the fealty of the province to Constantinople in question. For a brief period before John's arrival in Carthage, and perhaps as recently as April or May, the administration of the city had been in the hands of a usurper.<sup>1</sup> This was a general called Guntharith, who had previously held the title of *Dux Numidiarum* – one of the two or three most important military appointments in the region – but

<sup>1</sup> This episode has plausibly been dated to between January and May 546. On this issue, see note 240. These events are discussed in more detail (with full references) elsewhere in this chapter.

who had exploited his alliances with local Moorish leaders to overthrow the general charged with overall command in Africa and seize power. Although Guntharith held power for little more than a month before he was deposed in turn, the destabilizing effects of these successive coups and counter-coups were considerable, and the aftershocks were still being felt at the time of John's arrival around six months later. The loyalties of many prominent officials, such as the Praetorian Prefect Athanasius, who headed the civilian government of the region, were far from certain. Athanasius had been posted to Africa in 545, and had remained throughout Guntharith's rising, twice feasting with the usurper and hence lending tacit support to his authority. Although later accounts placed him among those who conspired against Guntharith, his loyalty to the emperor can scarcely have been completely assured, and similar doubts may have extended to more junior figures within his administration. Much the same is true of Reparatus, the Metropolitan of Carthage and the de facto leader of the African Church. Like Athanasius, Reparatus had remained in office throughout Guntharith's usurpation and had been directly implicated in the palace intrigues of those fateful weeks. In due course he was to be summoned to Constantinople in the context of an ongoing theological dispute and eventually charged with treason.

The loyalties of the imperial army in Africa were similarly uncertain in summer 546: some pockets of the garrison had resisted Guntharith but many had supported his coup. Of the entire military apparatus in Africa only one provincial field army, under the *Dux Byzacenaë*, Marcentius, is known to have pledged itself to Constantinople. The city garrison of Carthage came out for Guntharith, killing those who resisted; the Numidian army presumably remained loyal to the usurper who had previously commanded them, and there is no clear evidence for resistance elsewhere. Much the same was true of the federated Moorish commanders who were so crucial to the functioning of the military in the region. Corippus presents Moorish politics in simplified terms in the *Iohannis*: one of their leaders, Antalas, is the great antagonist of the epic, while another, Cusina, is among John's most important supporters. But in the topsy-turvy world of Carthaginian politics, even these superficially straightforward loyalties were not as clear as they seemed. At the height of Guntharith's coup, Antalas had come out as a loyal champion of Justinian, fighting against 'imperial' troops sent against him, while Cusina supported the usurper. Important as Cusina became to the restoration of imperial control under John Troglita, his loyalties were by no means assured in the summer of 546, and neither were those of many of his Moorish allies.

Less than fifteen years after Belisarius' triumphant entry into Carthage, then, John Troglita returned to a city in which the loyalty of the army, civic

government and church were far from assured. These circumstances are crucial to appreciating the context in which the *Johannis* was written and the political purpose it fulfilled. The poet confronted this extraordinary shift in the narrative of his poem. At the start of Book III, John asks the local soldiers what precisely had gone wrong over the previous decade and a half. His officer Gentius replies that it was something of a mystery:

‘The impious origin of the war that is rising is hidden from me, completely shrouded in impenetrable darkness.’<sup>2</sup>

Corippus’ own attempts to explain these events are illuminating. The remainder of Book III and much of Book IV are given over to a long analeptic digression in the voice of the tribune Liberatus. This summarizes the events which had taken place across the region from the birth of Antalas in around 500 CE to the overthrow of Guntharith and the landing of John in 546, with a particular focus on the period since around 530. This framing of the recent past is, however, complicated later in Book IV by counter-narratives which reinterpret the same events, first in the voice of Antalas (as reported by the Roman envoy Amantius), and then of John himself, who summarizes the key points of Liberatus’ account in rather different terms.<sup>3</sup> Viewed together, these passages reveal a great deal about the historical positioning of Corippus’ poem, and also about contemporary anxieties towards the recent past among the populace of Byzantine Carthage. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The present chapter responds directly to Gentius’ bewilderment and attempts to piece together the history of North Africa in the 530s and 540s from the varied sources available to us.<sup>4</sup> Of necessity, this is a history from the imperial (or at least Carthaginian) perspective: it privileges political and military issues, and Latin and Greek voices, over the multiple discrepant views of the Moorish groups who also participated in many of these events, and over the many silent provincial Africans who left no clear testimony of their own. This approach is determined in part by our sources, which are heavily skewed to the position of the social and political elite in Carthage. We have a far clearer sense of how the first dozen years of the imperial occupation looked from the reception halls and dining rooms of the capital than we do from the towns of the interior or the territories beyond, but even this was not a monolithic viewpoint. Key episodes in this unhappy

<sup>2</sup> *Ioh* III.45–6: ‘*impia quae fuerit belli nascentis origo | nos latet, abstrusis penitus contexta latebris.*’

<sup>3</sup> *Ioh* IV.358–92; IV.407–56. See Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> Diehl (1896) remains the standard overview of Byzantine Africa. See also Cameron (2000); Conant (2012), 196–251; Lassère (2015), 695–733; and (on the sixth century) Merrills (2022b).

history are often elusive or contradictory, and soldiers, administrators, historians and poets regarded the unfolding chaos differently. As we shall see, Corippus' own response to the recent past illustrates this process quite well, and hints at the multiple perspectives adopted by his contemporaries. As noted in Chapter 1, this is an important aspect of the *Iohannis* that can easily be overlooked if we simply regard it as a work of panegyric, concerned above all with articulating an official imperial perspective.<sup>5</sup>

### 533–534: The Foundation of Byzantine Africa

The earliest days of Byzantine rule in Africa were among the happiest of Justinian's long reign. On the morning of 15 September 533, the *magister militum per Orientem* Belisarius entered Carthage and reclaimed the city in the name of the emperor.<sup>6</sup> This occupation was the climax of an extraordinarily successful fortnight: at the very end of August, Belisarius' expeditionary force of around 15,000 regular troops, 2,000 *foederati* and perhaps 1,000 personal guards, supported by 32,000 sailors and marines, had landed on the coast of Byzacium at Caput Vada.<sup>7</sup> They swiftly occupied the small town of Sullectum, meeting minimal resistance from the local population as they marched north, and on 13 September inflicted a catastrophic defeat on the Vandal army at Ad Decimum, ten miles from Carthage.<sup>8</sup> By lunchtime on 15 September, Belisarius' fleet had safely anchored in the great harbour of the city and his troops set about their deployment, ferreting out any lingering Vandals and receiving their billeting orders. The general made his way to the Vandal royal palace on Byrsa Hill, where he ate the food prepared for Gelimer, presumably to mark the Feast of St Cyprian the previous day.<sup>9</sup> In the following hours, he received delegations from local merchants, pardoned those Vandals who had taken refuge in the churches of the city and undertook a first inspection of the dilapidated wall circuit.<sup>10</sup>

While the capture of Carthage was not the final act of the Vandal War – the armies met again in mid-December around twenty miles west of Carthage at a site called Tricamarum, and the Vandal King Gelimer only surrendered the following spring – it did represent an unexpected

<sup>5</sup> The events of John's campaigns – from late summer 546 to 548 – pose a rather different set of historical problems. Here we are almost entirely dependent on the narrative provided by the *Iohannis* and a few fragments from other sources. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> Proc. *BVI*.20.17–21; compare Evagrius, *HE* IV.16; Zonaras XIV.7.

<sup>7</sup> Proc. *BVI*.1.11.121; I.14.17; *Ioh* I.366–70. Pringle (1981), 17 summarizes the army.

<sup>8</sup> Proc. *BVI*.19.1–33. <sup>9</sup> Proc. *BVI*.20.17–21.8. <sup>10</sup> Proc. *BVI*.21.10–16.

conclusion to almost a century of barbarian rule in North Africa.<sup>11</sup> The Vandals had first landed in Mauretania in the later 420s, and made a temporary peace with the empire in 435, which granted them authority in northern Numidia. They soon reneged on this, and in 439, they moved east to capture Carthage before brokering a second treaty in 442 which established their power over the old heartlands of imperial Africa.<sup>12</sup> The eastern and western empires had not taken the loss of some of the richest lands in the Mediterranean lightly, but their efforts to reclaim them met little success, not least because of the extraordinary logistical challenges presented by the large-scale maritime expeditions such a reconquest would require. An eastern campaign in 441 was abandoned when attacks of the Huns in the Balkans dictated the necessary manpower be redirected to that front.<sup>13</sup> In 460, the western emperor, Majorian, assembled an invasion fleet, only to see it destroyed in its Spanish harbours by a well-timed Vandal raid.<sup>14</sup> Most memorably, in 468, a vast combined operation managed to capture Vandal holdings in Sardinia and Tripolitania and anchored an invasion force off Carthage, only to see it scattered by King Geiseric's fireships and its admiral, Basiliscus, flee in disgrace. Sources talk evocatively of attack ships on fire off the coast of Cap Bon, of fleets that filled the seas and of tens of thousands of soldiers lost.<sup>15</sup> While such laments tell us little about the exact scale of the campaign, they offer some indication of the magnitude of the catastrophe and the horror with which it was remembered even generations later.<sup>16</sup>

Traumatic as these failures may have been, changes in the political landscape by the early sixth century gradually turned the attention of Constantinople back to North Africa. In the aftermath of the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 and the death of the great Vandal ruler Geiseric in 477, the political balance of the western Mediterranean was recalibrated and the later kings in Carthage were increasingly marginal figures on the imperial stage. The emergence of new Moorish polities along

<sup>11</sup> Tricamarum: Proc. *BVII*.3.10–28; Gelimer's surrender – *BVII*.7.1–17. The history of the Vandals is now comparatively well studied. See especially Gil Egea (1998), Merrills and Miles (2010) and Steinacher (2016). Conant (2012) sets the kingdom in its wider African context.

<sup>12</sup> Merrills and Miles (2010), 61–70.

<sup>13</sup> Theoph. *AM* 5941; Priscus *Fr.* 9.4; Prosper a.442; Merrills and Miles (2010), 112–13.

<sup>14</sup> Priscus *Fr.* 31; Chron *Gall.* a.511.71; Proc. *BVII*.7.4–17; Merrills and Miles (2010), 119–20.

<sup>15</sup> Theoph. *AM* 5961; Ioh *Lyd.* *De Mag* III.43; Proc. *BV* I.6.1–27. Merrills and Miles (2010), 121–3; Brodka (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Theophanes and Procopius both state that the fleet of 468 numbered 100,000, a figure apparently derived from Priscus. Exaggerated as this figure clearly is, it gives some sense of the extraordinary scale of the expedition in the minds of imperial planners. On the constitution of the fleets, compare Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), 130–3.

the African frontier from the turn of the sixth century eroded Vandal authority inland, and the assertive foreign policies of Ostrogothic Italy and Constantinople similarly curtailed their influence in the islands of the western Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> The accession of the Vandal King Hilderic in 523 was initially a boon for the eastern empire. As the grandson of the former western Emperor Valentinian III through his mother, Eudocia, and of Geiseric on his father's side, Hilderic was able to position himself as a unifying cultural figure in Africa and enjoyed close ties to Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> But Hilderic was already quite elderly at the time of his accession and the Vandals suffered a series of military defeats to the Moors during his reign. According to the Hasding law of succession, Hilderic's distant cousin Gelimer would have inherited his throne upon his death, but the pretender chose not to wait that long. In 530, Gelimer gathered support from the Vandal military, imprisoned Hilderic and claimed the throne for himself, but the effect was merely to intensify the political crisis.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after the coup, Vandal garrisons in Sardinia and Tripolitania revolted and both appealed to Constantinople for support.<sup>20</sup> The combination of these crises with the ongoing struggles on the Moorish frontier proved terminal for Gelimer's regime. At the time of Belisarius' landfall in 533, the Vandal fleet was away in Sardinia and a substantial proportion of the army was committed either there or to the African front.<sup>21</sup> Impregnable as the Vandal kingdom had come to seem during the 450s and 460s, by the 530s, North Africa was exposed to a new imperial offensive.

The overthrow of Hilderic in 530 provided Justinian with the means, motive and opportunity for an African expedition: the loss of a valuable puppet was a diplomatic problem that needed to be addressed. Gelimer's breach of Vandal succession practice allowed Justinian to claim the moral high ground and present himself as a champion of the law.<sup>22</sup> While imperial strategic intelligence about the situation in North Africa was probably limited, the appeals from rebels in Tripolitania and Sardinia doubtless seemed auspicious.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to divorce the initial thinking behind the African expedition from the later campaigns in Italy and Spain, which make it look merely like the first stage in a programme of western

<sup>17</sup> Merrills and Miles (2010), 124–40.

<sup>18</sup> Proc. *BVI*.9.1–5; Merrills (2010); Merrills and Miles (2010), 59–60.

<sup>19</sup> Proc. *BVI*.9.6–25. This period is discussed in detail in Vössing (2017). See also Merrills (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Tripolitania: Proc. *BVI*.10.22–4; Sardinia: I.10.25–34. <sup>21</sup> Merrills (2016b) for discussion.

<sup>22</sup> On this improbable strategy, see Merrills (2010).

<sup>23</sup> Limited intelligence – Proc. *BVI*.14.1; Brodka (2004), 77–81. Ibba (2017) provides an important discussion of the Sardinian strategy.



reconquest, but there is reason to think that the emperor's ambitions were more limited at the outset.<sup>24</sup> Procopius refers to a letter that Belisarius intended to circulate among the Vandals at the time of his landing, which stressed that the imperial war was not against their kingdom, but rather its illegitimate king.<sup>25</sup> In the event, the letter was never sent and Gelimer forestalled any strategy of restoration by ordering the deaths of Hilderic and his only living nephew. Thereafter, the imperial success was so rapid that this diplomatic fiction could readily be abandoned.

Only in the heady aftermath of victory did the wider significance of the African expedition begin to be articulated consistently. As news of Belisarius' successes spread, so too did the stories that attributed this strategic master stroke to Justinian. We see this in Procopius' account of the emperor's argument with his closest advisors about the wisdom of intervening in Africa, during which only Justinian advocated for the expedition.<sup>26</sup> This image of an emperor standing alone – convinced in his divine support and in his capacity to succeed where earlier emperors had failed – has sometimes been taken on trust, but tallies more closely with the rhetoric that followed his victory than with any plausible prior sequence of events, and it was certainly heavily shaped by Procopius' literary motives.<sup>27</sup> It was Justinian too who accreted to himself the privileges of the victor. Just days after reports of the victory at Ad Decimum reached Constantinople, Justinian had adopted the honorific titles Vandalicus, Alanicus and Africanus; when news of Tricamarum broke some weeks later, the emperor declared that the African provinces had been regained, anticipating Gelimer's final surrender the following spring.<sup>28</sup>

In the first years of the occupation, the emperor's name and that of his consort were scrawled across the map of Africa. Its ancient capital became Justinian's Carthage (Carthago Iustiniana) and the same epithet was applied to Capsa and to a new foundation where the invasion fleet had landed at Caput Vada.<sup>29</sup> Hadrumetum was renamed Justinianopolis (having previously been called Hunericopolis after the Vandal king).<sup>30</sup> When the general Solomon finally extended imperial control to the distant Hodna massif far to

<sup>24</sup> Lillington-Martin (2018) addresses some of these issues. <sup>25</sup> Proc. *BVI*.16.13–14.

<sup>26</sup> Proc. *BVI*.10.1–17; compare Evagrius *HE* IV.16.

<sup>27</sup> Meier (2003), 167; compare *CJ* I.27.1.6–7. On the (considerable) literary impulses at play in this section of *Vandal War*, compare Evans (1971); Brodka (2004), 73–6; Anagnostakis (2014); Kaldellis (2016).

<sup>28</sup> Shown in the confirmation of the Digest (December 533) and compare *Inst. Just.* Proem.; *CJ* I.17.2 Pr.

<sup>29</sup> Carthage: *Nov. Just.* 37; *Ioh* VI.58–9; Proc. *Buildings* VI.5.8. Lassère (2015), 719; Stevens (2019) surveys the archaeology of the littoral of Byzacium in this period.

<sup>30</sup> Hadrumetum: Proc. *Buildings* VI.6.7.

the south-west, one of the settlements founded there was named Justiniana Zabi.<sup>31</sup> This honorific is only known to us from a chance epigraphic find, and it is likely that many other such imperial towns were created across the region. Inscriptions further show that Cululis took the name Theodoriopolis and Vaga Theodorias after the empress, while Procopius tells us that a new bathing complex in Carthage was also named in her honour.<sup>32</sup> None of this was unique to Africa – Justinian liberally scattered his name across the whole of his empire – but it was certainly common there.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, few inhabitants of the reconquered African provinces can have been unaware of the identity of their new ruler.

Justinian's ultimate responsibility for the African victory was reiterated in every possible medium. When Belisarius was formally awarded a military triumph for his African conquests in 534, the procession focused unambiguously on the emperor, since Belisarius and Gelimer both prostrated themselves before him on the sands of the hippodrome.<sup>34</sup> Visual art reinforced the point. In the first book of his panegyric *Buildings*, Procopius describes the mosaic which ornamented the domed ceiling of the portico of Justinian's palace in Constantinople, which depicted Justinian and Theodora sitting in splendour above defeated Vandals and Goths.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the motif even accompanied Justinian to the grave. In his encomium on the accession of Justin II in 566, Corippus described the funeral pall of the deceased emperor. Here, Justinian was picked out in golds and purples, his foot crushing the throat of the abject Gelimer while a personified representation of Africa looked on in gratitude.<sup>36</sup>

### Imperial Ideology and Participation

Only God was permitted to share credit with Justinian for his victories in North Africa. The Vandal kings were adherents of the Homoian doctrine of Christianity and were widely condemned as 'Arian' heretics, both by the

<sup>31</sup> Located near Msila. CIL VIII.8805; Durlat (1981), 57–8; Pringle (1981), 252. There is a further edition and commentary on the inscription in Laporte (2002), 153–4.

<sup>32</sup> Cululis: Durlat (1981), 37–41 (no. 15); Pringle (1981), 196–7; Pringle (2002). Vaga: Proc. *Buildings*, VI.5.14. Baths in Carthage: Proc. *Buildings*, VI.5.10. A mosaic panel from the East Church at Gsar el Lebia (Cyrenaica) also includes the inscription 'Polis nea Theodora', which may indicate that city was also renamed after the empress. Compare Goodchild (1960), 246; Reynolds (2000), 170, and the cautionary note of Cowell (2014), 91. Proc. *SH* IX.27 and XII.30 indicate that she had travelled to the region with the governor Hekabolios [PLRE II Hecebolus], prior to her marriage to Justinian.

<sup>33</sup> Meier (2003), 147–8.

<sup>34</sup> Proc. *BV* II.9.1–16; Ioh Lyd. *De Mag.* II.2. On the political emphases of this triumph, see McCormick (1986), 125–9; Meier (2003), 150–60; Börm (2013).

<sup>35</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, I.10.16. <sup>36</sup> *Laud. Iust.* I.274–87.

Nicene churchmen of North Africa and by the imperial authorities who claimed to have liberated the region.<sup>37</sup> The successes there, won at marvelous speed against heretical barbarians who had proved impervious to earlier assaults, were readily cast as evidence for the providential support the emperor enjoyed, and have been seen as a turning point in the early part of the reign.<sup>38</sup> The emperor continued to emphasize his divine mission in North Africa. Stories were spread of African martyrs who had visited Justinian in his dreams and begged for the release of the province from its heretical captivity, and of Nicene exiles who had made their appeals to the emperor in person.<sup>39</sup> We see these motifs not only in Procopius' retrospective narrative, but also within the official legislation for the new provinces. Following the unexpected collapse of the Vandal regime, imperial laws emphasized the heresy of the defeated group and Justinian's role as liberator of the Nicene population.<sup>40</sup> Over the course of his reign, Justinian would support construction of countless new churches across North Africa, but this took time.<sup>41</sup> In the first months of the occupation, his focus was mostly on legislation, some of which he seems to have drafted himself. His devotions were reciprocated, at least at first.<sup>42</sup> In spring 535, 220 bishops met in the Basilica Fausti in Carthage for the first African church council in a decade and declared their warm support for the emperor and for the peace he brought to their church.<sup>43</sup>

This support shaped imperial policy in turn. In the summer of the same year, Justinian abandoned the religious pragmatism which had characterized the first months of the occupation and issued a law which excluded Arians, Jews, Donatists and Manichaeans from holding local office and limited their rights to worship.<sup>44</sup> Bishop Reparatus of

<sup>37</sup> On the complex entanglement of sociological and doctrinal issues in 'Homoian' and 'Homoousian' Christianities in Vandal Africa, see the brilliant appraisal in Whelan (2018).

<sup>38</sup> Meier (2003), 150–82; compare Maas (1986), 26; Maas (1992), 45–6.

<sup>39</sup> Proc. *BVI*.10.18–20; compare Evagrius *HE* IV.16 and Theoph. *AM* 6026. See also Vict. Tun. a.534.1; Zach Rhet IX.17. Conant (2016), 117–18.

<sup>40</sup> *CJ*. I.27.1.2–4; Nov. 28; Nov. 37 Pref; Nov. 78; App. 2. Puliatti (1980), 48–55, 67–73.

<sup>41</sup> See Miles (2019) for an overview of church building in Carthage. Compare Yasin (2016) on the nuances of the programme more widely.

<sup>42</sup> For an overview of imperial church legislation in Africa, see Adamiak (2016), 53–65 and the important observations of Kaiser (2007), 68–94 and 115–54. Justinian's personal role in the legislation is discussed in Honoré (1975) and Honoré (1978), 25 and condemned in Proc. *SH* 14.5. His personal involvement in the edicts of spring 534 has also been suggested by Diehl (1896), 120; Puliatti (1980), 100. For the African responses to Justinian's engagement with more theological issues, see Dossey (2016) and Fournier (2023). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Coll Av* 85, 87; Kaiser (2007), 103–10.

<sup>44</sup> Nov. 36. Compare *Coll Av* 86, 88. This shift has been widely discussed. See especially Kaegi (1965), 38–42; Kaiser (2007), 80–94; Merrills and Miles (2010), 248–52.

Carthage, who had presided over the council of 535, was elevated to the status of metropolitan in recognition of the importance of his city to both church and empire.<sup>45</sup> But this consensus between the African church and the new ruler was not to last long. By the early 540s, Justinian was attempting to bring doctrinal unity to the empire. This impulse may have been magnified by his own sense of divine guidance, as well as by the cataclysmic horrors which the plague brought to the Mediterranean world after 542, but was also driven by a desire to address the seething divisions among eastern bishops that were beginning to be felt in the corridors of the imperial palace.<sup>46</sup> Whatever Justinian's motivation, his push for unity created problems within an African church and generated a theological crisis (the Three Chapters controversy) which was to smoulder for the remainder of Justinian's reign and which implicated many of the leading figures of the African church.<sup>47</sup>

Justinian was on rather firmer ground in his determination to refashion Africa's cities, and this process left the most lasting traces of the imperial presence in the region. The lands around Roman Carthage had always been densely studded with towns, many of which had weathered the Vandal period relatively well.<sup>48</sup> These remained important centres of population and economic activity – and probably also of local identity – but over the fifth and early sixth centuries they had evolved physically in ways that were rather different from the cities of the eastern Mediterranean. In the east, circuit walls, colonnaded streets and grand gates had become the most familiar symbols of civic dignity, but these had always been scarce in Africa: Carthage had been hurriedly fortified in the 420s, and some cities of the interior may have erected temporary defences in periods of crisis, but these seem to have been exceptional.<sup>49</sup> When Procopius and his contemporaries looked at the newly conquered provinces, the defenceless settlements they saw barely seemed like towns at all, and the historian concluded that the Vandals must have deliberately destroyed their circuit walls.<sup>50</sup> He was

<sup>45</sup> Nov. 37.9; Nov. 131; Vict. Tun. a.551; compare Kaiser (2007), 105–9, and Markus (1979).

<sup>46</sup> On the plague (which has been the subject of extensive scholarship outside Africa, but has rarely been considered within the region) see Chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> The details of this crisis – and its connection to the composition of the *Johannis* – are explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>48</sup> Leone (2007), 127–66, provides a clear overview. See also Bockmann (2013).

<sup>49</sup> *Chron. Gall.* 452 a.425 dates the construction of the walls to that year. On the significance of the date (and the archaeological evidence for the walls), see Wilson (2019), 691–6, and the references therein. On the association of towns with their walls and gates, compare Leone (2007), 187–97, and the wider study of Jacobs (2013). I am grateful to Ine Jacobs for specific help on this issue, particularly during the 2020 lockdown.

<sup>50</sup> Proc. *BVI*.5.8; *I*.15.9 and *Buildings* VI.6.1–2 (referring to Hadrumetum specifically).

almost certainly mistaken in this, but the idea suited the new imperial ideology and helped justify a grand rebuilding project. Where the barbarians had supposedly degraded African towns, Justinian would restore their dignity and city walls would be the obvious marker of this. In his *Buildings*, Procopius lists 24 African cities which received new walls, alongside a further five major fortifications, while Evagrius states that the emperor defended 150 cities in the region.<sup>51</sup> Some of these building projects were massive and encircled a substantial urban core, whereas others essentially consisted of the fortification of citadels at the heart of cities, or the patching of pre-existing walls.<sup>52</sup> Archaeology and epigraphy confirm the scale of this building programme, which continued on piecemeal for the rest of the century.

This urban transformation signified the reintegration of the region into the wider imperial world. Its likely impact on the emperor's new subjects is vividly illustrated by Procopius' evocative account of a new urban foundation at Caput Vada:

So the Emperor Justinian . . . conceived the desire to transform this place forthwith into a city which should be made strong by a wall and distinguished by its other appointments as worthy to be counted as an impressive and prosperous city; and the purpose of the Emperor has been realized. For a wall had been brought to completion and with it a city, and the condition of a farm land is being suddenly changed. And the rustics have thrown aside the plough and lead the existence of a community, no longer going the round of country tasks but living a city life. They pass their days in the market place and hold assemblies to deliberate on questions which concern them; and they traffic with one another, and conduct all the other affairs which pertain to the dignity of a city.<sup>53</sup>

There is no archaeological evidence to confirm the transformation of Caput Vada, but in a sense this is beside the point.<sup>54</sup> In Procopius' account, the civic amenities are granted emphatic agency: the new urban fabric was to fashion imperial citizens.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, this is a reminder that wall-building was not simply a defensive measure, and in many cases the cultural implications of these new structures proved even more significant.<sup>56</sup> Ammaedara (Haidra) in northern Byzacium illustrates this

<sup>51</sup> Proc. *Buildings* VI.5.1–7.11. Evagrius, *HE* IV.18.

<sup>52</sup> Durliat (1981) and Pringle (1981) are fundamental. Compare N. Duval (1983) and Pringle (2002).

<sup>53</sup> Proc. *Buildings* VI.6.13–15. tr. Dewing.

<sup>54</sup> Stevens (2019), 254, summarizes the scarce archaeological evidence for the site.

<sup>55</sup> Cameron (1989), 173–4. <sup>56</sup> Février (1989), 84–5.

well.<sup>57</sup> A wall circuit was erected there between 539 and 544, effectively creating a fortified hub at the junction of the main roads between Carthage and Lambaesis, Thelepte and Capsa. It encircled a central core of approximately 2.5 hectares and effectively split the city into inner and outer parts.<sup>58</sup> Francois Baratte's work has revealed how the new wall cut across existing neighbourhoods and funnelled traffic through chokingly narrow gates.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, familiar urban landmarks disappeared under their own fortifications: the Severan triumphal arch was walled up to become a small extramural fort, thereby transforming a long-standing symbol of civic pride into a pragmatic military installation.<sup>60</sup> All of this must have changed civic life dramatically, and in other cities of the region, fora, temples and bathhouses were similarly fortified.<sup>61</sup> In Justinian's Africa, civic restoration and military strength were to be closely intertwined.

If the solidity of civic defences was understood as an index of imperial power, however, their defects could also count against it. A passage in the first book of the *Iohannis* illustrates this point well. We have already seen how John Troglita looked aghast at the war-torn landscape of the territory, but his spirits were at their lowest when he gazed upon Caput Vada, the site of the original imperial landing:

'While this fortress remains unfinished, even as war threatens, how many people are deprived of safety! If victory favours my banners in war, I will complete the fortifications begun here, and strengthen them with hard stone.' In this way he grieved for cities lying abandoned by their citizens, and for their houses lying empty.<sup>62</sup>

This is a far cry from the bustling Mediterranean port city Procopius imagined and instead evokes a region apparently neglected by imperial power. But the image also testifies to the success of the underlying ideology: for the poet, like the historian, strong civic defences represented firm imperial control, and John's victories would be confirmed by a restoration of these walls.

<sup>57</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.7.10–11. Recent work is summarized in Baratte (2019) (with references). On the impact of the walls at Ammaedara, see especially Baratte and Bejaoui (2010); on this phenomenon more generally, compare Jacobs (2013), 100–6.

<sup>58</sup> Two and a half hectares is roughly the size of four modern football pitches (and 1/830,000th the size of Wales).

<sup>59</sup> Baratte and Bejaoui (2010), 528. <sup>60</sup> Baratte and Bejaoui (2010), 534.

<sup>61</sup> Leone (2007), 191–2; Baratte and Bejaoui (2010), 534–6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ioh.* I.406–12: *haec quo tempore castra | imperfecta manent tanto in discrimine belli, | quot populis subtracta salus! Victoria signis | si faueat per bella meis, ego coepta replebo | munimenta loci firmo solidata metallo.* | *sic fatus doluit desertas ciuibus urbes | et uacuas iacuisse domos.*

### The New Frameworks of Imperial Power

Justinian left little to chance in his plans for the African provinces. In a law addressed to the Praetorian Prefect Solomon on New Year's Day 535, intended to clarify various issues relating to the restitution of the estates occupied by the Vandals to their rightful owners, the emperor revealed the importance of setting everything in its proper place:

It is our belief that anything undefined, and lacking in proper limits, is impolitic and untidy, we deem it right to set our own acts within defined bounds. Thus, we recently promulgated a divine pragmatic directive for our Africa – which, thanks to our own lucubrations, God has brought under Roman rule.<sup>63</sup>

Justinian's words here reflect the sentiments of an emperor who had just overseen an unprecedented codification of Roman law and was notoriously fascinated by the minutiae of governmental practice. The 'pragmatic directive' consisted of two edicts which were issued in April 534 and which survive in the second edition of the *Justinianic Code*.<sup>64</sup> These were addressed to Archelaus, the Praetorian Prefect of Africa, and Belisarius the *Magister Militum per Orientem*, respectively the chief civilian and military authorities in the region. These edicts laid out the basic civic and military systems under which the African provinces were to be governed, explained the responsibilities of different members of the administration, and provided an unusually detailed reckoning of the salaries which came with these different appointments. Together these texts provide an unusually rich portrait of provincial government in the 530s, which can be supplemented by similar documentation from other regions of the empire and by scattered evidence from within North Africa.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps inevitably, however, the well-defined structures dictated from the imperial *scrinium* did not always translate easily to the messy reality of government in a distant region.<sup>66</sup>

The emperor's principal civilian representative in Africa was the Praetorian Prefect, an office which made the new region the third

<sup>63</sup> Nov. 36. Proem. tr. Miller and Sarris (2018), 349.

<sup>64</sup> *CJ* I.27.1, 2. Puliatti (1980) is the fullest overall study. Kelly (2004), 64–104, puts this material in its wider bureaucratic context.

<sup>65</sup> Haldon (2005) provides an overview.

<sup>66</sup> For a wise cautionary note, compare the comments on Byzantine Italy by Brown (1984), 48: 'To think in terms of administrative master-plans in the early middle ages is to presuppose a level of central authority, resources and systematic planning which no ruler could command.'

great prefecture in the empire, alongside Illyricum (in the Balkans) and Oriens (in the East).<sup>67</sup> This testifies to Africa's political importance, as well as to the practical difficulties of governing a territory so far from Constantinople. The Praetorian Prefect was assigned administrative, judicial and financial oversight, including the collection of revenues and the payment of civil and military personnel.<sup>68</sup> He was supported by a staff of 396 officials organized into eight bureaux (*scrinia*) and five supplementary offices (*scholae*). Four of the *scrinia* had financial responsibilities under accountants (*numerarii*), while the other four were broadly concerned with the administration of justice, record-keeping, petitions and prisons.<sup>69</sup> This entire administrative apparatus was based in Carthage, probably in the old Vandal royal palace (formerly the proconsular palace) on Byrsa Hill.

Outside Carthage, Justinian reinstated the old Roman provincial system, albeit with some changes. The administration of the region on the ground had changed substantially during the Vandal century, not least through the emergence of independent Moorish polities across Mauretania and parts of western Numidia, which reduced the direct influence of Carthage considerably.<sup>70</sup> Justinian's legislation divided the reconquered territories into six provinces (seven including Sardinia, which had also been part of the Vandal kingdom and continued to be governed as part of Africa).<sup>71</sup> The first of these was Zeugi (or Zeugitania), comprising the hinterland of Carthage, including the rich lower Bagradas valley and the peninsula of Cap Bon, and roughly equivalent to the old province of Africa Proconsularis. The second was Byzacium (also Byzacena) which stretched to the south as far as Chotts and the pre-desert, across a region which had been farmed intensively when under Roman and Vandal control. The next most important province was Numidia, to the west of Zeugi and Byzacium; this included the rich plains around Constantina as well as the mountainous hinterlands of the Lesser Kabylia (to the north) and the Aurès massif (to the south). The remaining three provinces were rather smaller. Tripolitania consisted of the coastal strip of what is now north-western Libya, including the important cities of Lepcis Magna, Sabratha and Oea. The frontier system inland was complex, and Tripolitania remained an important military sector, as we shall see. Finally,

<sup>67</sup> Diehl (1896), 98–103.

<sup>68</sup> *CJ* I.27.1.12–19. Compare Nov. 36; 37; 70.1; 119.1; 128.1; 152; App 9; Diehl (1896), 98–100.

<sup>69</sup> *CJ* I.27.1.22–43; Puliatti (1980), 83–90; Diehl (1896), 103–7.

<sup>70</sup> Merrills (2022a) for a short introduction. The historiography is explored in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> *CJ* I.27.1.12–13; Diehl (1896), 107–12.



Mauretania was subdivided into two: Mauretania Prima around Sitifis (which was brought under effective imperial authority only after 539), and Mauretania Secunda (which comprised a handful of coastal cities in what is now northern Algeria and small pockets of territory in their hinterlands).<sup>72</sup> Each of these provinces was entrusted to a governor (*iudex*) and a staff of fifty administrators. Three of these governors (over the westernmost provinces of Zeugis, Byzacium and Tripolitania) had consular rank; the others (over Numidia, the Mauretaniae and Sardinia) were *praesides* of lesser status.<sup>73</sup>

Justinian's conception for the government of North Africa was founded on the clear separation of civil and military authority, a principle which can be traced throughout his provincial reforms of the 530s, but which proved almost impossible to implement in practice.<sup>74</sup> This approach was established in the sending of separate edicts to Archelaus and Belisarius, and by the imposition of a distinct military hierarchy, which operated on different terms from the civilian. The basic units of military organization in North Africa were five *limites*, or frontier commands, each of which was to be placed under the authority of a *dux* (duke), whose headquarters were provisionally established in major cities in the province on the expectation that they would move as imperial control expanded.<sup>75</sup> The *Dux Tripolitanae* was to be based in Lepcis Magna, the *Dux Byzacena* in Capsa and Thelepte (apparently splitting his time between the two), the *Dux Numidia* in Constantina and the *Dux Mauretaniae* in Caesarea. A fifth *Dux* was appointed to maintain control of Sardinia, not least through the monitoring of bandits in its hills.<sup>76</sup> A garrison was also posted to the isolated stronghold of Septem (Ceuta) in the far west under the authority of a tribune who answered to the *Dux Mauretaniae* and had command of a small fleet.<sup>77</sup> The new African *limites* did not map precisely onto the provinces set out in the civil edict, but their outline is essentially similar. In addition to this, Justinian may have envisaged some coordination with the *Dux Libyae Pentapoleos* in Cyrenaica (now north-east Libya). This was formally part of the Egyptian diocese and had remained under

<sup>72</sup> Procopius testifies to the limits of imperial control in Mauretania in Proc. *BV* II.20.30–2. On the Byzantine presence in the region compare Y. Duval (1970); Pringle (1981), 64–5; Aïbèche (2014); Hamdoune (2018), 314–22.

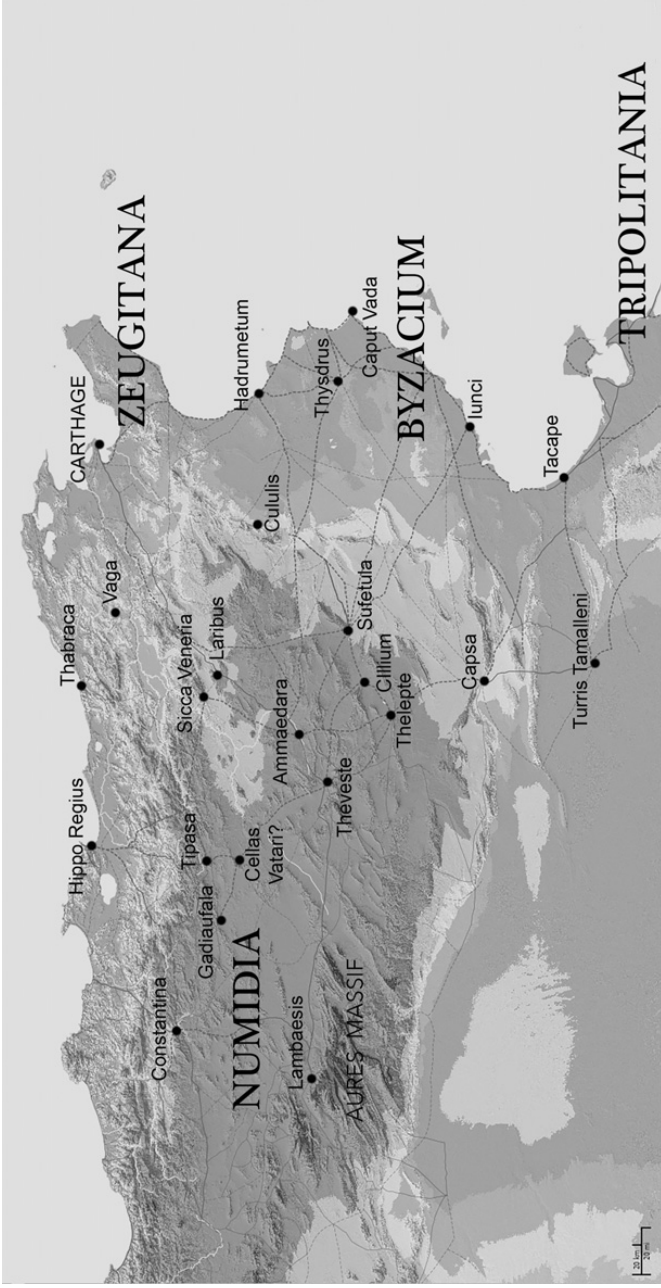
<sup>73</sup> *CJ* I.27.1.12–14.

<sup>74</sup> Compare *Nov.* 102.2. Stein (1959), 319–20; Jones (1964), 280–2; Puliatti (1980), 34–40.

<sup>75</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.1a. Puliatti (1980), 107–9; Pringle (1981), 58–65; Lassère (2015), 701–3.

<sup>76</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.1a–4. Basic outline discussed in Pringle (1981), 22–3; Conant (2012), 198–9.

<sup>77</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.2. Compare Proc. *Buildings* VI.7.14–18; *BV* II.5.6. On the archaeological background, see Bernal Casola and Perez Rivera (2000) and Bernal Casola and Villada Paredes (2020).



Map 2.1 Map of Byzantine North Africa

imperial authority throughout the Vandal period, but had strategic connections with the regions further west, not least through their shared concern with the Moorish groups of the Syrtic coast.<sup>78</sup> The military archaeology of the Pentapolis is far from perfect, but indicates a systematic reorganization under Justinian with close parallels to activities further west.<sup>79</sup>

Each *dux* had at his disposal a small field army (*comitatus*) as well as detachments of frontier soldiers (*limitanei*), who were expected to cultivate the lands of the frontier regions as well as defend them.<sup>80</sup> The exact troop dispositions at this level of the chain of command are not specified in Justinian's edict and were left to the discretion of Belisarius. In fact, our knowledge of the specific units deployed in Africa is surprisingly slight, thanks to Procopius' almost total silence on the issue.<sup>81</sup> It seems clear that in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, the ducal field armies were made up of both infantry and cavalry units and were staffed with troops from the original imperial expeditionary force. These included *foederati* – elite units which were often made up of barbarian allies, but which could include soldiers of varied backgrounds.<sup>82</sup> The total numbers of troops involved were probably modest. Procopius' account indicates that the regular units and federates of Belisarius' army numbered around 15,000 in 533/4, with 2,000–3,000 more allies and guards.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, a proportion of this army was redeployed to the invasion of Sicily in the following year, which suggests that each of the five ducal field armies probably numbered no more than 3,000–4,000 troops at most, and may have been significantly smaller.<sup>84</sup> Justinian's edict states that frontier defence was to rest primarily with the *limitanei*, who were variously drawn from the local population and from veterans, but this would have

<sup>78</sup> The military organization of Cyrenaica is hinted at in Anastasius' Edict of 501 from Ptolemais (*SEG* IX.356 and 414). The outline of the ducal command is essentially similar to that of the African provinces in 534, with particular reference to barbarian groups at 11. The authority of the *Dux Libya* was further expanded circa 539 in *Ed Just* XIII.18, which established his military seat at Paratonium.

<sup>79</sup> Reynolds (2000) provides a useful overview. And compare Proc. *Buildings*, VI.2.1–23.

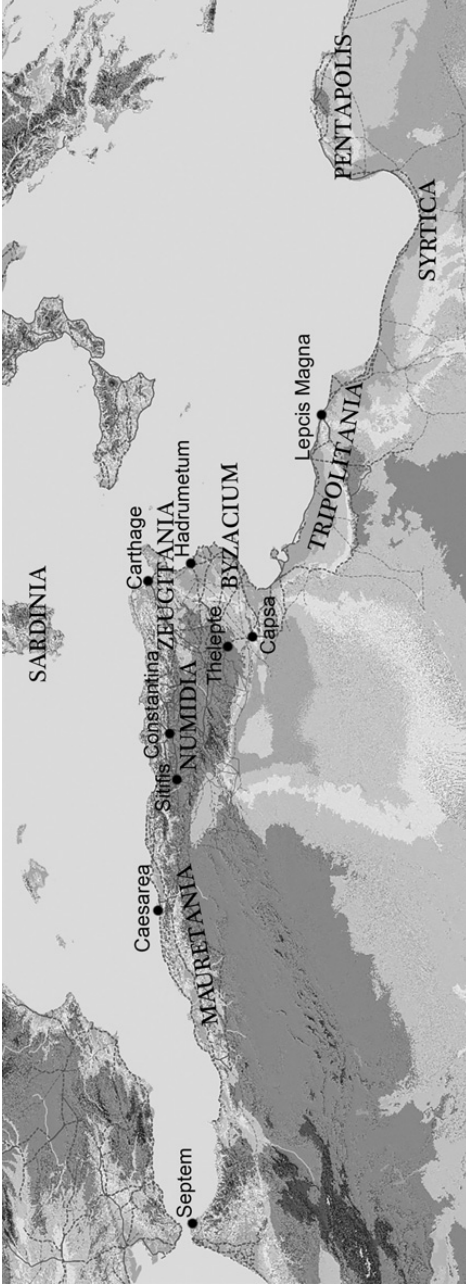
<sup>80</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.8–9. Pringle (1981), 67–8, 70–2; Whately (2021), 96–101, discusses the terminology in its sixth-century context.

<sup>81</sup> *CIL* VIII 17414, Pringle (1981), 332–3, no. 43 commemorates an officer from the *numerus Bis electorum*, apparently stationed in Hippon Regius, and *CIL* VIII 9248, Pringle (1981), 333, no. 45 another from the *numerus Primi Felices Iustiniani* stationed in Rusguniae. On these, compare Pringle (1981), 72–3; Ravagnani (2005), 193–5.

<sup>82</sup> Whately (2021), 108–14, is a sober overview of the scholarship. Proc. *BV* I.11.2–5 is explicit that the *foederati* in the African army were not distinguished by ethnicity.

<sup>83</sup> See note 7.

<sup>84</sup> Proc. *BG* I.5.2–3. Estimates of numbers are exceptionally difficult. For further discussion, especially as this relates to the size of John Troglita's field armies in 546–8, see Chapter 5.



Map 2.2 Imperial North Africa in the wider world

taken some time to implement. In any case, distinctions between frontier troops and field armies were increasingly blurred in this period.<sup>85</sup> The first local recruitment from Africa seems to have been to regiments who were then posted elsewhere in the empire.<sup>86</sup>

We know from Procopius that the first stages of provincial defence depended upon detachments of regular troops or *foederati*, who may have patrolled quite widely. A senior officer called Althias, for example, was posted to Centuriae in southern Numidia with a compact detachment of around seventy Huns and was charged with oversight of the local defences.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, peacekeeping in Byzacium was assigned to the Thracian officer Rufinus and the Hun Aigan, who commanded 500 cavalrymen between them. This system did not last long – Rufinus and Aigan were defeated and killed by a far larger alliance of local Moors – but shows what the commanders in Carthage hoped would suffice to maintain order.<sup>88</sup> Each provincial *dux* was also assigned an administrative staff of around forty men, including financial and judicial officers and clerks (who were not particularly well paid).<sup>89</sup>

It is important to note that no senior commander in Africa was granted formal authority over the provincial *duces* in the edict of 534; instead, supreme power rested with the emperor.<sup>90</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the occupation, of course, considerable authority was vested in Belisarius, but only ever in a provisional capacity. Even then Justinian kept his leash short: Belisarius was promptly recalled to Constantinople as soon as rumours of his treachery reached the imperial palace.<sup>91</sup> Significantly, Belisarius is formally addressed as *Magister Militum per Orientem* in the 534 edict, the military rank he held at the time of the conquest and retained in the period that followed. Neither he nor any of Justinian's other appointments were formally recognized as *Magister Militum per Africam* (vel sim.), and the creation of Africa as a distinct regional command is first attested only in 578, late in the reign of Justin II.<sup>92</sup> According to the edict of 534, Justinian

<sup>85</sup> Whitby (1995), 70–1; Elton (2007), 536–7; Whately (2021), 161–7.

<sup>86</sup> Specifically five regiments of *Iustiniani Vandali* who were shipped to the eastern frontier noted at Proc. *BV* II.14.17–20 and a unit of *Numidae Iustiniani* known from Hermopolis in Egypt. On which see *PLRE* III Ploutinus and Ravegnani (2005), 192 (with references).

<sup>87</sup> Proc. *BV* II.13.1–17. *PLRE* Althias. <sup>88</sup> Proc. *BV* II.10.3–12; *PLRE* Rufinus I, Aigan.

<sup>89</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.20–34. This is the same as the ducal bureaucracy for Cyrenaica in Anastasius' Edict of 501, *SEG* IX.356.1–2.

<sup>90</sup> Puliatti (1980), 101.

<sup>91</sup> Proc. *BV* II.8.1–8 and compare *SH* XVIII.9. Proc. *BG* II.30.1–2 implies that something similar happened after the fall of Ravenna.

<sup>92</sup> *Ioh Bic.* a.578. Compare Durliat (1979); Pringle (1981), 55–6; Zuckerman (2002), 169–72; Koehn (2018), 33–4.

alone retained rights of appointment in Africa, oversight over military planning and a veto over fortification and other expenditures.<sup>93</sup> It is likely that the emperor was concerned with the political threat that an autonomous African military might pose to the economy and stability of the Roman state: if this was the case, he inherited the anxieties of a succession of western emperors in the fourth and fifth centuries who had likewise viewed these rich provinces with caution and limited the military authority of commanders there for fear of rebellion.<sup>94</sup>

Justinian's supremacy may seem like a minor detail of administrative protocol, and modern scholars have generally assumed that the African command was formally instituted from 534, even if we lack positive evidence for it.<sup>95</sup> After all, it is easy enough to identify the *de facto* commanders in Africa in this period. Belisarius (533–4) was succeeded by Solomon (534–6, 539–44), whose two periods of office were separated by the appointment of the emperor's nephew Germanus (536–9). Sergius (544–5), Areobindus (545) and briefly Artabanes (546) all then held command prior to the arrival of John Troglita in summer 546. All of these men were *magistri militum* of one sort or another. But this was a fluid title in the sixth century, and the exact relationship between personal authority and the power inherent in the office these individuals held remained undefined. The lack of a formal military command in Africa led some of Justinian's generals to assume civilian titles as an alternative means of establishing their authority, in spite of the emperor's concern to separate the two parts of his government. In the aftermath of widespread unrest in the summer of 534, Solomon became Praetorian Prefect as well as military commander, and this new civilian authority doubtless helped with the logistical planning for his campaigns that year.<sup>96</sup> He resumed both his military responsibilities and his civilian office when he returned to Africa in 539.<sup>97</sup> When Solomon died in battle in 544, his nephew Sergius succeeded to the civil office, alongside with his military command, and the two were separated only following the appointment of Athanasius as Praetorian Prefect in 545.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.5; 13. <sup>94</sup> Compare Wijnendaele (2019); Merrills (forthcoming)

<sup>95</sup> Durliat (1979). Compare Jones (1964), 655–6, and the stemma *Magistri Militum per Africam* in *PLRE* IIIB (p. 1500). Lassère (2015), 707, identifies John Troglita as the first to hold this office, but there is no positive evidence for this.

<sup>96</sup> First attested in *Nov.* 36.1 [January 535]. *PLRE* III Solomon 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Proc. BV* II.19.1; *Marc Com Add.* a.539. The title is attested in the contemporary epigraphy. Compare Durliat (1981), 7–58.

<sup>98</sup> *Proc. BV* II.22.1–2; *Marc Com Add.* a.541.3 identifies him as *dux belli moderatorque provinciae*. *PLRE* III Sergius 4. Brown (1984), 1–20, discusses similar issues in Byzantine Italy.



This ambiguity created difficulties and allowed rivalries within the region to fester. When the senator Areobindus was sent to Africa in 545, for example, he was instructed to share military command with Sergius, which caused major problems for the army in the field, not least because of Sergius' unpopularity and Areobindus' inexperience.<sup>99</sup> Procopius narrates how this led to military paralysis and a failure to muster adequate forces against the rebel Stotzas at Sicca Veneria. Corippus likewise presents this period as a particularly grim moment in the unfolding crisis.<sup>100</sup> This collapse in the chain of command may have been exceptional – and Procopius notes that Areobindus held sole military authority after Sergius was eventually recalled – but the absence of a fixed hierarchy in 534 seems to have exacerbated the problem.<sup>101</sup>

Provincial government was similarly fluid. According to the edicts of 534, provincial governors and military *duces* had administrative staffs of comparable size, but the latter were better paid and the *duces* were of a higher social standing than their civilian counterparts.<sup>102</sup> The titles of these military adjutants – *Adsector*, *Primicerius*, *numerarius* – imply that they had some financial and administrative responsibilities, which may have overlapped with those of the civilian officials.<sup>103</sup> While the Praetorian prefect had nominal authority over military pay, including that of the provincial commanders, the *duces* probably retained responsibility for some tax collection and for regulating corruption (a point which also hints at other revenue streams potentially open to them). A letter of the churchman Ferrandus to an otherwise unknown count (*comes*) called Reginus outlines the duties of these officers in the eyes of the civilian population.<sup>104</sup> While Ferrandus' account was certainly shaped as much by his own Christian morality as the practice of imperial administration, his emphasis upon moral and political leadership, and particularly the role taken by the ideal imperial officer in ensuring correct religious observance, remains conspicuous.<sup>105</sup>

Ultimately, the government of the African provinces in practice was shaped not only by the formal civil and military offices instituted in 534, but also by the individuals who held these posts and the competition for authority between them and their backers.<sup>106</sup> This was magnified by the distance between Carthage and Constantinople and, within Africa, between the frontier postings and the provincial capital. Justinian's

<sup>99</sup> Proc. *BVII.24.1–3*. <sup>100</sup> Proc. *BVII.25.3–15*. *Iob. IV.94–6*. On which see Chapter 3.

<sup>101</sup> Proc. *BVII.25.16*. <sup>102</sup> Diehl (1896), 128–9. <sup>103</sup> Diehl (1896), 130–2.

<sup>104</sup> *PL* 67 928B–950A. <sup>105</sup> Compare Cooper (2007), 31–7, and Whelan (2018b), 407–16.

<sup>106</sup> Meier (2003), 251–73, is an important reflection on the importance of personnel to Justinian's administration more broadly.

legislation provided ample bureaucratic support for those appointed to high civilian and military office, but most brought their own entourages with them, and informal networks of influence remained vital to the smooth functioning of government.<sup>107</sup> The overwhelming majority of senior appointments came from outside the province, of course: this was standard practice in late Roman government and would have been natural enough in the early years of any occupation. As a result, Latin- (and Punic-) speaking Africa was ruled in the name of Rome by a minority who generally spoke Greek.<sup>108</sup> The highest levels of the army were also dominated by outsiders, often clustered into cliques determined by their province of origin or past service. Belisarius' staff, for example, was largely made up of men who had served with him on the eastern front, with many hailing from Thrace.<sup>109</sup> Artabanes similarly was supported during his year in office from 545 to 546 by an influential contingent of Armenians, and the particular loyalties of that group seem to have shaped its actions during those tumultuous months.<sup>110</sup> Family connections could also be important: during his second prefecture, Solomon was supported by the appointment of his nephew Sergius as *Dux Tripolitanae*; a second nephew, Cyrus, held a similar position in Libya Pentapolis (Cyrenaica), and a third, another Solomon, also served in the African military.<sup>111</sup> Artabanes' brother and cousin were among his Armenian contingent, two Lazic brothers Rufinus and Leontius fought in the African army and reached high rank, and John Troglita himself had served alongside his brother Pappus in the first expedition.<sup>112</sup>

While social connections like these could have huge practical advantages, they also exacerbated tensions with outsiders, particularly when rival networks were in competition. One recurrent theme in Procopius is just how unpopular many senior figures in the African administration were. This was not simply a matter of trivial gossip: the loss of Hadrumetum and the defeat of the imperial army at Thacia in 545, for example, were the direct result of ongoing hostility between Sergius and his followers and the clique around John, son of Sisiniolus.<sup>113</sup> Similar tensions simmered beneath the mutiny of

<sup>107</sup> Bureaucracies: Puliatti (1980), 114–17. On cliques, see especially Parnell (2015) and Parnell (2017), 103–30.

<sup>108</sup> Cameron (1993); Vössing (2010), 205–16; Conant (2012), 244–6.

<sup>109</sup> Conant (2012), 229–31; Parnell (2017), 112–25.

<sup>110</sup> Proc. *BV* II.24.2 and II.27.11–14. Compare Conant (2012), 231.

<sup>111</sup> Compare Conant (2012), 241–4.

<sup>112</sup> *PLRE* III Artabanes 2, Leontius 2, Rufinus 2. Rufinus may have been *Dux Tripolitanae* in 547 (*Ioh* VI.221).

<sup>113</sup> Proc. *BV* II.22.3–4; II.23.32; II.24.7–8; *SH* V.28. Compare Parnell (2017), 123–4. Sergius' younger brother Solomon also seems to have been unpopular, to judge from *BV* II.22.12–20 and *SH* V.34–8.



536 and the fiendish schemes and counter-schemes of the Guntharith revolt.<sup>114</sup> None of this was unique to the army in Africa, and comparable practices were probably widespread throughout the Roman period. Procopius delighted in recounting tensions of this kind, and it has even been argued that Justinian may have deliberately fostered social divisions between his generals in order to forestall challenges to his own authority.<sup>115</sup> Whether or not this was the case, it is important to remember that the army of occupation was a complex entity, and that military activity within the region was often determined as much by internal rivalries as it was by a coherent, overarching strategy.<sup>116</sup>

The effects of these complexities and internal tensions are immediately obvious in the management of political relations with the local power holders in the first years of the occupation. Various ‘Moorish’ or ‘Berber’ leaders had risen to prominence in Mauretania, Numidia, Byzacium and Tripolitania during the Vandal century, and the security of the new imperial provinces depended on effective negotiation with these figures.<sup>117</sup> The Moorish elites were the true power brokers of the frontier regions and diplomatic engagement with them required the consolidation of military alliance, not simply the maintenance of peaceful relations. It is impossible to know the numbers of followers that these leaders could muster – our imperial sources are few and exaggerated, and demographic data are almost impossible to ascertain in any other way – but no imperial campaign in North Africa in this period was undertaken without significant support from Moorish allies.<sup>118</sup> Even so, the edicts of 534 offered little guidance in how to handle these pressing concerns. The instructions laid down there were more concerned with the practical problems of provincial government than with the more fluid questions of ‘barbarian’ diplomacy, and were content with the fiction that the African provinces had already largely been secured.

This omission need not imply that Justinian’s strategy towards local power holders was wholly unplanned. In the earliest days of the occupation, Belisarius was content to allow some prominent Moors to retain a degree of political independence and imperial support in return for their deference. Leaders who acknowledged the emperor’s authority were to be

<sup>114</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.22–3, 33; II.25.15–28; II.26.10–14; II.27.1–41. <sup>115</sup> Parnell (2017), 126–7.

<sup>116</sup> Kaegi (1995), 6. ‘[The army was] riven with various fault-lines of rivalries and jealousies and grievances and conflicting ambitions.’

<sup>117</sup> Chapter 4 discusses recent scholarship on Moorish groups.

<sup>118</sup> Morizot (2015), 112–19, makes a spirited attempt at estimating relative demographics, but merely illustrates the scale of our ignorance.

recognized in turn and thereby assigned their place within the wider imperial cosmos. This is illustrated most clearly by a famous passage from Procopius' *Wars*, in which he describes how a delegation approached Belisarius in Carthage in 534:

For all those who ruled over the Moors in Mauretania, Numidia and Byzacium sent envoys to Belisarius saying that they were slaves of the emperor and promised to fight alongside him. They were even some who surrendered their children as hostages and requested that the insignia of office be sent to them from him according to the ancient custom. For it was law among the Moors that no-one should be a ruler over them, even if he was hostile to the Romans, before the emperor of the Romans gave him the tokens of the office. They had already received these from the Vandals, but did not deem the office to be secure. These symbols are a staff of silver covered with gold and a silver cap that does not cover the whole head, but like a crown is held in place on all sides by bands of silver; also a kind of white *tribon* fastened by a golden brooch on the right shoulder in the form of a Thessalian *chlamys*, and white *chiton* with embroidery and a golden boot.<sup>119</sup>

While Procopius identifies this as a continuation of a practice from the Vandal period, diplomatic gestures of this sort had a far older pedigree. Several earlier texts describe analogous practices in the earlier empire, and the epigraphic evidence testifies to the wide adoption of formal Roman titlature by local leaders across the region.<sup>120</sup> Procopius probably witnessed Belisarius' receipt of this request at first hand, and his account has sometimes been taken as a reflection of the exoticism of Moorish dress (and customs) in the eyes of the historian. In fact, it probably demonstrates the opposite: the crown, tunic, cloak, brooch and shoes appear in comparable form elsewhere in the Justinianic world. Indeed, the emperor gave similar (if somewhat more impressive) sets of regalia to representatives of the Lazi from the Armenian Caucasus.<sup>121</sup> The details of the individual symbols of rule varied in some ways between groups, and the Moors may well have evaluated each of them differently, but the ensemble of regalia would have been legible to Procopius and his contemporaries. Such expressions of

<sup>119</sup> Proc. *BVL*.25.3–8, tr. Kaldellis (2014), 191 (with minor modifications).

<sup>120</sup> For example, Livy 30.15.11, 30.17.13; Tac *Ann.* 4.26; Serv *Ad Aen.* IV.242. Rollason (2016), 33–4. On Moorish titlature specifically, see Merrills (2021a).

<sup>121</sup> This relates to two separate episodes in 522 and 555/6. On which see Theoph. AM 6015.168; *Chron Pasch.* 613.4; Malalas 413.17–18; Agathias III.15.2. Also see Canepa (2009), 32–3; Nechaeva (2014), 208–20; Rollason (2016), 1–10. On the comparison with the Moorish regalia, compare Modéran (2003a), 489–93 and Merrills (2021a).

client management were crucial to maintaining peace, but they also fitted the Moors firmly into a far wider network of power.<sup>122</sup>

It was Belisarius who bestowed regalia on the Moorish envoys in the name of Justinian. As the commander of the army of occupation and a principal agent of the imperial state, his role is understandable. John Troglita enjoyed comparable status when he received envoys from the Astrices during his campaign across the Tripolitanian frontier in 547, and Corippus' account again implies that this was normal practice.<sup>123</sup> But the matter became more confused in the early years of the occupation, not least because of the way military authority was distributed. Given the very large number of different groups living on and around the frontiers, and the vast geographical span that they covered, the provincial *duces* provided the only practical point of contact for most regional diplomacy. We have positive evidence for this in the case of one meeting between the *Dux Tripolitanae* Sergius and eighty representatives of the neighbouring Leuathai (or Laguatan) groups in Lepcis Magna in 543.<sup>124</sup> This meeting ended in disaster, and, as we shall see, the murder of all but one of the Moorish envoys contributed directly to the military problems of the mid-540s. But Procopius is clear that it should have been part of the normal process of frontier government: disputes would be resolved, tokens of authority distributed, oaths taken and authority acknowledged by both sides.<sup>125</sup> In the first book of the *Iohannis*, Corippus alludes to the close connections John had previously enjoyed with the Moorish leaders, and these were presumably established when he served as a provincial *dux* in the later 530s.<sup>126</sup> A passage elsewhere in the poem alludes to a foolhardy imperial officer in Tripolitania called Pelagius who mustered local groups called the Mecaes and Ifuraces as allies when he marched in support of Solomon in 544.<sup>127</sup> Sadly, these lines are corrupted: it is implied that the failure to support Solomon at the Battle of Cillium was typical barbarian intransigence, but the poet also alludes to suspicions around Pelagius' loyalty, and it was clearly his action which brought these groups to the field. Negotiation with the local Moorish groups seems to have been a central responsibility of every provincial *dux* and was part of practical government on the frontier regions. Presumably, the appointment of a new official would precipitate a new round of meetings of this kind, as the local leaders

<sup>122</sup> Nechaeva (2014), 225–35; Merrills (2021a). See also Rollason (2016), 55–86, for the particular semiotics of the clothing.

<sup>123</sup> *Iob* VI.391–407 and see Chapter 3. <sup>124</sup> *Proc.* BV II.21.1–15, 22–3; *SH* V.28.

<sup>125</sup> *Proc.* BV II.21.2. <sup>126</sup> *Iob* I.469–72. See the discussion in Chapter 4.

<sup>127</sup> *Iob* III.41–2; compare Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 279; *PLRE* III Pelagius 1.

established their relationship and reaffirmed the status of all the parties concerned.<sup>128</sup>

How we view the shortcomings of this system depends on our perception of the imperial apparatus as a whole. If we are to believe Procopius, it was fatally compromised by the incompetence of certain imperial officers (such as Sergius), and by the essential untrustworthiness of the Moors. The historian repeatedly castigates these barbarians for their duplicity, even when narrating episodes which often imply that it was the Roman commanders who had gone back on their word.<sup>129</sup> Procopius' attitude may have been widely shared in Carthage (and Constantinople), but such familiar tropes should not conceal the degree to which many of the empire's difficulties in ruling Africa were essentially inherent within the imperial structure set out in 534, and particularly in the wide distribution of diplomatic responsibilities. By the later 530s, the loyalty of the major Moorish leaders of Numidia, Byzacium and Tripolitania was secured only through local military commanders. In itself, this had the potential to turn petty rivalries between such officers into far larger problems. Crucially, if provincial commanders could be sources for political legitimization among the warlords of the frontier, then so too could imperial rebels: the mutineer Stotzas gained important support from Moorish leaders at different stages of his revolt, and this certainly magnified the threat posed by his rising.<sup>130</sup> When imperial *duces* themselves became rebels, this problem increased exponentially. As we shall see, a central feature of Guntharith's plot against the state in late 545 was the mobilization of Moors from Numidia and Byzacium, whom he hoped would threaten Carthage and bring his rival Areobindus into the field.<sup>131</sup> Guntharith wielded this power in his capacity as *Dux Numidiae*. As a result, when Areobindus scrambled to mobilize allies in response to this threat, he struggled to find an appropriate channel through which to act.<sup>132</sup>

The Moors themselves were not passive participants in all of this, of course.<sup>133</sup> The Moorish leader Antalas in particular had been the most prominent imperial ally in southern Byzacium from 534 to 544, and he

<sup>128</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that the excavators of the so-called Ducal Palace from Apollonia in Cyrenaica noted that the large adjoining chapel may have been intended for the swearing of oaths of this kind. Goodchild (1960), 253–5.

<sup>129</sup> Compare Proc. *BV* I.25.9; II.8.11–18; II.11.2–14; II.13.37; II.17.9–10; II.17.31–3; II.26.2–4. A Moorish perspective is hinted at in *BV* II.11.9–12; II.21.17; II.21.20–2; II.22.7–10; II.27.1–3.

<sup>130</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.8–9; II.17.32–5; II.22.5; II.23.26; II.24.12. Compare Marc Com Add. a.536/7.3; Marc Com Add. a.542/3.3.

<sup>131</sup> Proc. *BV* II.25.1–28.41. <sup>132</sup> Proc. *BV* II.25.15–17.

<sup>133</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

seems to have originated from this region.<sup>134</sup> His position earned him formal recognition from Carthage, but it also placed him at the centre of another web of alliances and dependencies that stretched across the province and beyond the frontier.<sup>135</sup> Significantly, he appealed directly to Justinian when he felt his own interests were not being recognized in the great game of African politics, and he was evidently well aware of the contingent nature of the political agreements he fostered.<sup>136</sup> But Antalas' appeal to the emperor also highlights the weaknesses of the administrative hierarchy in Africa: he did this because he did not recognize the authority of the Prefect (and *magister militum*) Solomon, who had killed his brother and refused to honour the existing agreement with the empire. Given Solomon's actions, it is easy to see why Antalas and others like him turned to Stotzas, Guntharith and other local leaders in pursuit of their own interests. What resulted was a sometimes bewildering narrative of plots and counterplots, as we shall see, but the fault lines within the imperial system were a root cause of this complexity.

### Byzantine Military Campaigns in North Africa 534–546

The history of conspiracy, sedition and mutiny in early Byzantine North Africa between 534 and 546 is intricate and frequently confusing. The political contortions, side-switching and skulduggery can make even a patient reader despair, and it is easy to lose track of the broader outline of events in the minute detail of particular episodes. As a result, many modern historians have been content to defer explicitly to the narrative provided by Procopius.<sup>137</sup> The unrivalled detail of his *Wars* makes his influence inescapable, but regrettably this appropriation has sometimes simplified his account of the shifting affiliations of Byzantine generals and African leaders into an underlying opposition between 'Roman' and 'Moorish' antagonists in a way that Procopius would hardly recognize. His account is also complicated by his own increasing distance from events in Africa: a participant in the initial occupation, Procopius left Carthage in Easter 536 and does not seem to have returned.<sup>138</sup> Thereafter, he kept

<sup>134</sup> On Antalas' origins and the discussions surrounding them, see Merrills (2018), 372–80.

<sup>135</sup> *PLRE* III Antalas; Camps (1988a); von Rummel (2010) Modéran (2003a), 324–34 and *passim*.

<sup>136</sup> Proc. *BV* II.22.7–10; compare Ioh IV.358–92 and the discussion in Chapter 3.

<sup>137</sup> Compare, for example, Bury (1923), II.124–48; Stein (1959), 311–28; Pringle (1981), 18–33; Rubin (1995), 33–49; Evans (1996), 133–6, 151–3; Heather (2018), 244–51. Whately (2016), 115, n. 3, correctly observes that this deference is more or less inescapable.

<sup>138</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.41. Greatrex (2022) outlines Procopius' movements.

a relatively close eye on events down to about 540 (and his narrative is quite full for this period), but his sources became increasingly sporadic down to 546 and the text is largely made up of vivid portraits of discrete episodes rather than a continuous narrative.<sup>139</sup> In his rendition, the history of Africa in this period was above all one of internal dissent, an emphasis which was deftly recognized in the precis of his work by the later historian Agathias:

Procopius' narrative also gives an account of how, after the destruction of the Vandal Kingdom and the successes and reverses of the Moors when they took up arms against the Romans in many parts of Africa, Stotzas and Guntarith, who were on the Roman side, set themselves up as tyrants and were the prime cause of untold disasters and dissensions in Africa, and of how that country had no respite from her ills until both men were destroyed.<sup>140</sup>

Other historical sources give much the same picture. Procopius' own *Secret History* – a samizdat of sorts which recasts the material of the *Wars* in a very different light – depicts Africa as a place of deep suffering, which he blames more on political incompetence and military infighting than the Moorish troubles.<sup>141</sup> For his part, the African chronicler Victor of Tunnuna emphasized Moorish involvement in the crises of the later Vandal period, but presented the military conflicts of early Byzantine Africa solely in terms of internecine fighting.<sup>142</sup> The same is true of the continuation of the *Chronicle* of Marcellinus Comes, which refers only occasionally to Africa, and then in the context of military rebellion and not Moorish wars. This perspective probably reflects the form in which news reached Constantinople from Carthage.<sup>143</sup> Jordanes is the only contemporary chronicler to mention John Troglita's victory over the Moors, but even he devotes rather more space to internal conflicts within the African army than he does to this supposedly climactic victory over outside enemies.<sup>144</sup>

The major military and political problems facing the Byzantines in Africa in the first years of the occupation were the product of internal problems within the imperial administration rather than external pressures

<sup>139</sup> Rance (2022), 82: 'With the successful conclusion of the Vandalic war (4.8.1) and Belisarius' recall from Africa, a unilinear narrative thread of fast-paced conquest frays into a tangle of tumultuous events.'

<sup>140</sup> Agathias, *HE* Proem 25 tr. Frendo.

<sup>141</sup> Proc. *SH* V.28–38; XVIII.5–12 (which places the Moors among Justinian's many victims at 7).

<sup>142</sup> Vict. Tun. a.541.2, a.544, a.546, a.546.2. Victor makes no reference to the Moors in this period.

<sup>143</sup> Marc Com Add. a.534/5, a.535/6.2; a.536/7.3; a.539/40.4; a.542/3.3; a.544/5.2; a.546/7.6. The only reference to the Moors in his *Chronicle* is by association with Stotzas in a.542/3.3.

<sup>144</sup> Jord *Rom* 385. Compare the references to mutinies at 369, 370, 384. There are no other references to the Moors.

from outside actors.<sup>145</sup> While this pattern may be exaggerated somewhat by the tendency of contemporary commentators to focus on imperial affairs, and by their widespread reluctance to ascribe agency to barbarians (especially to those groups which were poorly known at the imperial centre), the consensus of our sources on this point is remarkable.<sup>146</sup> This is not to downplay the importance of the external actors themselves, or the threat they might have posed. African ‘Moorish’ leaders could mobilize massive contingents of armed men (and women) and disrupt provincial life over extended periods, and their actions occasionally metastasized into significant military crises for the empire, but their involvement within the imperial provinces was almost always the result of internal upheaval within the army of occupation, rather than the other way around. Ambitious figures within the administration turned to local leaders for support, either to buttress their own claims to authority or to frustrate others in doing so. This in turn magnified internecine squabbles into much larger conflicts. As a result, these groups became an increasingly important factor in imperial affairs. In this sense, the situation in Africa was analogous to that recently identified along Rome’s northern frontier in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>147</sup> There are also important parallels with the Balkan frontier in the sixth century, where the imperial army faced different strategic problems, but where the complexities of local diplomacy had similar results.<sup>148</sup> The underlying crisis John Troglita faced in 546 was not the unprecedented gathering of allied Moorish barbarians against Byzantine rule, but rather the almost complete collapse of a unified imperial authority in Carthage and beyond. Corippus presented John’s victory over the Moors as his principal accomplishment, since this was an appropriate subject matter for a martial epic, and it helped distract from

<sup>145</sup> Kaegi (1981), 9: ‘Military unrest is so central in Byzantine history that its study has implications for the interpretation of some of the principal lines of the empire’s history. An understanding of Byzantine military unrest is essential for an accurate knowledge of Byzantine history.’ Compare Sjöström (1993), 39: ‘The real source of trouble for the imperial administration and army were the Berbers, the local Libyan tribes’; Breccia (2008), ‘With the end of the Vandal war, the African guerrilla war commenced without interruption’ (*Finita la guerra vandolica, cominciava dunque senza soluzione di continuità la guerriglia Africana*); and, most recently, Meier (2021), 726 (citing Steinacher [2016], 308), who identifies ‘a never-ending Moorish war after the capitulation of Gelimer in 534 until the first appearance of the Arabs in 647’ (*genau genommen mussten die Byzantiner nach der Kapitulation Gelimers 534 bis zum ersten Erscheinen der Araber 647 einen nie endenden Maurenkrieg führen*). These assumptions are typical.

<sup>146</sup> The same sources are less circumspect about ascribing agency to other barbarian groups. Compare Pohl (2005).

<sup>147</sup> Halsall (2007) summarizes this work well.

<sup>148</sup> Discussed in the thorough study of Sarantis (2016). Compare for example page 392: ‘Periodic and transitory raids were an inevitable corollary of inter-barbarian, intra-barbarian and barbarian-Roman diplomatic and military relations.’



the many internal problems which had led to this crisis. Ultimately, however, it was the general's restoration of unchallenged political authority in Carthage which underlay his success and which proved fundamental to a lasting peace in the region.

### Solomon's First Campaigns (535–536)

The first challenge the expeditionary army faced after the collapse of the Vandal kingdom was the consolidation of imperial authority across the provinces and wider frontier regions. As we have seen, envoys from the Moorish leaders of Byzacium and Numidia arrived in Carthage shortly after the occupation of the city, and their standing was formally acknowledged in return for their continued loyalty. Belisarius' subsequent departure for Constantinople disrupted this delicate balance and led to a succession of violent clashes across both provinces.<sup>149</sup> Military authority passed to Solomon, his Syrian adjutant who had served with Belisarius as a *domesticus* since 527 and had commanded a unit of *foederati* during the invasion of 533. Solomon also became Praetorian Prefect at around this time, following the death of Archelaus.<sup>150</sup> Justinian supported Solomon by despatching further units under Theodore the Cappadocian and Hildiger, as well as a new wave of administrators to oversee the taxation of the region.<sup>151</sup> In the short term, however, these reinforcements could do little. The skeletal provincial garrisons established in the aftermath of the occupation could not stop the escalating violence. To the horror of contemporaries in Carthage, a detachment of around 500 cavalry was also defeated by the Moors in the mountains of Byzacium.<sup>152</sup>

In spring 535, Solomon began re-establishing imperial control in Byzacium and Numidia. His initial attempts to revive diplomatic agreements rebuffed, he adopted a more aggressive approach which proved more successful.<sup>153</sup> Solomon's field army first encountered Moorish forces under the joint leadership of Cusina, Esdilasas, Iourphouthes and Medisinissas, near a place called Mammes, probably on the eastern edge of the Tunisian Dorsal in northern Byzacium.<sup>154</sup> Procopius describes the

<sup>149</sup> Proc. *BV* II.8.9–20. <sup>150</sup> *PLRE* IIIB Solomon 1. <sup>151</sup> Proc. *BV* II.8.24.

<sup>152</sup> Proc. *BV* II.10.1–12. The precise chronology of this episode is not clear.

<sup>153</sup> Proc. *BV* II.11.2–8. Diplomatic overtures of this kind seem to have been standard practice, and John Troglita later followed the same pattern. See Chapter 5.

<sup>154</sup> Proc. *BV* II.11.14–56. The site was later fortified: Proc. *Buildings* VI.6.18 (although Modéran (2003a), 571, identifies this passage with Ammaedara). Compare *Ioh* VII.281–5, who refers to Moors gathering at the 'Plains of Mammes' (*campis Mamensibus*) in early 548, which was probably the same location. Pringle (1981), 271, provides a clear overview.



victory which followed in some detail. His account of the Moorish tactic of circling camels in a defensive ring may suggest that some of these barbarians were pastoralists from the south who had joined the revolt, but the bulk of their forces certainly originated in Numidia and Byzacium.<sup>155</sup> Solomon's victory celebrations in Carthage were cut short by news that those Moors who had escaped at Mammes had regrouped and were creating further troubles elsewhere in Byzacium.<sup>156</sup> He immediately marched on their camp in the mountains of Burgaon, a site which has not been located securely, but may have been close to Sufetula.<sup>157</sup> After a difficult victory there, Solomon returned once more to Carthage. Antalas was left as the principal imperial representative in Byzacium, having remained loyal to the imperial cause throughout this period of upheaval.<sup>158</sup>

Solomon's third campaign of 535, against Iaudas, the most important Moorish leader in the Aurès mountains, proved inconclusive.<sup>159</sup> Iaudas' ongoing raids against the agricultural lands of Numidia provided the ostensible justification for this expedition, but local political considerations were also a factor.<sup>160</sup> Several of the Moors who had been defeated at Burgaon had found refuge in the Aurès and may have been regarded as a continuing threat.<sup>161</sup> Local strategies for peacekeeping had meanwhile been disrupted: a working agreement between the Moors and the imperial officer Althias, who commanded the garrison at Centuriae, seems to have collapsed when the Roman commander seized control of a local water source and rebuffed Iaudas' efforts to take it back.<sup>162</sup> Simultaneously, Solomon was approached by other Moorish leaders from the region, including Massonas and Ortaias, who sought imperial intervention against Iaudas for a variety of reasons, including dynastic disputes.<sup>163</sup> With significant military support from these local allies, Solomon embarked upon an ambitious expedition into the Aurès, but he was unable to draw Iaudas into fighting and departed from the region at the end of the campaigning season

<sup>155</sup> Proc. *BVII*.11.17–19. This tactic is associated with Cabaon's Tripolitanian Moors at *BVI*.8.25–6 and twice appears in the *Iohannis*. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>156</sup> Proc. *BVII*.12.1–30.

<sup>157</sup> Proc. *BVII*.12.3. Courtois (1955), 349, makes the point that this could be identical with the Autenti alluded to in *Ioh* III.318–19, which the Antonine Itinerary places near Sufetula. Pringle (1981), 357, n. 25.

<sup>158</sup> Proc. *BVII*.12.30. <sup>159</sup> Modéran (2000); Modéran (2003a), 350–63. *PLRE* III Iaudas.

<sup>160</sup> Proc. *BVII*.13.18. <sup>161</sup> Proc. *BVII*.12.29.

<sup>162</sup> Proc. *BVII*.13.1–17. *PLRE* III Althias. Procopius' narrative emphasizes an episode of ritualized single combat between Althias and Iaudas, but the allusions to diplomatic norms seem equally significant.

<sup>163</sup> Proc. *BVII*.13.18–19. Hamdoune (2018), 341–3; Modéran (2003a), 374–83, for full discussion.

without winning a decisive victory.<sup>164</sup> His plans to return to Numidia the following spring would be frustrated by other events, not least the first significant tremors of unrest within the imperial army.

### **The Outbreak of the Stotzas Revolt and Its Aftermath (536–544)**

The first major military revolt in Africa erupted at Easter 536 and remained active (with dormant periods) until 544. Procopius presents this episode as the start of Africa's difficulties, just two years after Justinian's optimistic edicts, and it was widely mentioned in contemporary chronicles, even those which otherwise expressed little interest in the region.<sup>165</sup> The mutiny had several distinct causes, all of which were related to the economic and religious policies of the imperial government.<sup>166</sup> The aggressive orthodoxy of the Christian laws introduced in 535 had angered some soldiers: Justinian's prohibition of Arian worship made no provision for the significant proportion of his army who were themselves members of that church.<sup>167</sup> Procopius notes that these included a number of barbarian *foederati* who had been part of Belisarius' expedition, but doubtless it antagonized some local recruits as well.<sup>168</sup> The Easter celebrations thus became an outlet for their discontent. Meanwhile, other imperial soldiers who had hoped to settle in Africa and had married the wives, widows and daughters of the defeated Vandals were also moved to revolt when they discovered that the estates they had taken as their inheritance were to be confiscated by the state.<sup>169</sup> It is likely that these specific grievances were underscored by perennial problems of military supply and pay (a challenge for imperial logistics throughout the period), but also perhaps by the personal unpopularity of the Prefect Solomon.<sup>170</sup>

Procopius was present during the earliest days of the rebellion in Carthage, and his narrative is vivid and detailed. Following two bungled attempts to assassinate him during the Easter service, Solomon was forced into hiding and eventually fled to Sicily, where Belisarius was preparing for the Italian expedition.<sup>171</sup> Carthage was left in the hands of Theodore 'the Cappadocian', one of Solomon's principal lieutenants, who had already

<sup>164</sup> Proc. *BV* II.13.20–39.

<sup>165</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.6 presents this alongside the 'Dust Veil' event of 536 as a key turning point in his narrative. Vict. Tun. a.541.2, a.543, a.546; Marc Com Add. a.535/6.2, 539/40.4; 542/3.3.

<sup>166</sup> Kaegi (1965) and Kaegi (1981), 46–9, are the best overviews. <sup>167</sup> Nov. 37 [535].

<sup>168</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.12–21. Procopius emphasizes the Arianism of the Herul *foederati* in particular, whose leaders Cyrillus and Pharas were killed in Numidia some weeks later. Compare Jord. *Rom* 369.

<sup>169</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.7–10. <sup>170</sup> On pay, see below 82–84. <sup>171</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.22–42.

been approached by the rebels as a possible leader. Although he was acclaimed by the rebellious army in the city's hippodrome, Theodore remained loyal and held Carthage until Solomon returned from Sicily with Belisarius and a hand-picked coterie of troops.<sup>172</sup> The rebels then departed the city and elected as their leader a certain Stotzas, who had served as a high-ranking soldier in the entourage of the officer Martinus (Martinus) during the wars of 533–4.<sup>173</sup> Belisarius led around 2,000 loyal troops from Carthage into the field, but he was heavily outnumbered: Procopius states that the rebels numbered around 8,000 at this point and enjoyed the additional support of around 1,000 Vandals who had escaped imperial service.<sup>174</sup> Although the numbers need to be treated with caution, they are not beyond the bounds of possibility; records of troop dispositions were kept in Carthage, and Procopius may have had access to them.<sup>175</sup> They also give some sense of the scale of the rebellion, which involved perhaps as much as half of the soldiers stationed in Africa at this time.<sup>176</sup> The two forces engaged briefly at Membresa, 35 stades (c.45 miles) from Carthage, but the rebels deserted the field and fled for Numidia.<sup>177</sup>

The true scale of the threat posed by Stotzas' rebellion became apparent only once the rebel army was established in Numidia, by when Belisarius had returned to Sicily, leaving Solomon in sole command. The loyal troops in this province were under the *Dux Numidiae* Marcellus who was based in Constantina, and Solomon had despatched an officer to ensure the loyalty of this garrison. Marcellus duly encountered Stotzas' mutineers at Gadiaufala in the summer of 536, but the results were disastrous.<sup>178</sup> Most of his army went over to the rebels, and the *dux* was killed along with Cyrillus and Pharas, two commanders of the *foederati*.<sup>179</sup> By this stage, much of the African army was in revolt: Procopius states that two thirds sided with the rebels.<sup>180</sup> This included most of the troops in Numidia, a large proportion of what had been the garrison in Carthage, many of the

<sup>172</sup> The acclamation is discussed in Van Nuffelen (2007).

<sup>173</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.1–8. *BV* I.11.30 and II.15.1 identify him as *domestikos*, which is the same position that Solomon had held in the entourage of Belisarius (though there were probably several grades). Jord. *Rom* 369 states that he was a *clientulus* and of very low status, but his insistence on this point may reveal the opposite. *PLRE* III Stotzas.

<sup>174</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.2 (8,000); II.15.4 (1,000 Vandals and II.14.17–21 for the story of their desertion). Belisarius' troop strength is given at *BV* II.15.9–11.

<sup>175</sup> Compare Proc. *BV* II.16.3 (Germanus checks the records in Carthage on precisely this point). Whately (2021), 82–4.

<sup>176</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.2. <sup>177</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.12–14. <sup>178</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.50–9.

<sup>179</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.59; Jord. *Rom* 369.

<sup>180</sup> Proc. *BV* II.16.3. On Procopius' use of military records, compare Whately (2021), 82–3; Treadgold (2007), 218.

barbarian federates and the revenant Vandal soldiers still in the province. No less important, the rebellion of the Numidian army brought with it the diplomatic connections to the barbarians of the region including Iaudas, the major power broker of the Aurès massif who had eluded Solomon in the previous year, and Ortaias, an ally of the Roman commander in 535. Each of them now sided with the mutineers.<sup>181</sup>

In response to this, Justinian sent his cousin Germanus to Africa. He boasted a distinguished military record following success in the Danube theatre and was appointed *Magister Militum Praesentalis* and *Patricius* in the spring of 536.<sup>182</sup> After assessing the scale of the problem, Germanus made public his intention to address the rebels' complaints, and declared that any troops who came back to the imperial fold would be awarded full back pay.<sup>183</sup> The success of this gambit indicates the importance of the issue of pay to the rebellion, but Germanus was doubtless also helped by his personal standing and his direct connection to the emperor. Stotzas marched on Carthage in the hope of rekindling resentment within the army, but turned back around twenty miles from the city.<sup>184</sup> He then retreated to his power-base in Numidia, chased by Germanus, who hoped to press home his advantage. The two armies met at *Scalae Veterae* (named *Cellas Vatari* by *Corippus*).<sup>185</sup> This was almost certainly close to the modern city of Fedj es-Siouda, and an ancient crossroads between Tipasa, Gadiaufala and Theveste.<sup>186</sup> Procopius relates the sequence of the battle in some detail, including the scattering of the right wing of Germanus' army (which was commanded by John Troglita) and the eventual victory of the loyalist forces.<sup>187</sup> This is emphatically presented as a civil conflict by Procopius, a point that lends pathos to its eventual denouement:

But neither side could be distinguished either by their own comrades or by their opponents. For all used one language and the same equipment of arms, and they differed neither in figure nor in dress, nor in any other way whatever.<sup>188</sup>

Stotzas' Moorish allies played an important role in the resolution of the battle: Iaudas and Ortaias took to the field with the rebel, but had secretly

<sup>181</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.8–9.

<sup>182</sup> Proc. *BV* II.16.1–3; Marc Com. a.535/6.2, 9; Proc. *BG* III.40.5–6. See *PLRE* II, Germanus 4 and Stein (1959), 324–7.

<sup>183</sup> Proc. *BV* II.16.1–7. <sup>184</sup> Proc. *BV* II.16.8–9.

<sup>185</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.3; *Ioh.* III.317. For the treatment of this episode in the *Iohannis*, see Chapter 3. And compare Kaegi (1965), 48.

<sup>186</sup> Pringle (1981), 26. *AAA* 18.478; *Barrington Map* 34. <sup>187</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.13–32.

<sup>188</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.21. tr. Kaldellis.

received envoys from Germanus and did not immediately commit to the fighting.<sup>189</sup> Once Stotzas' defeat was assured, however, they joined in with the general looting of his camp. Procopius presents this as a typical example of Moorish duplicity – and his description of barbarians (and other soldiers) holding back until the outcome of a battle was clear is a common trope throughout the *Wars*.<sup>190</sup> Stylized as it may be, this episode nevertheless hints at the degree to which alliances with Moorish leaders could make or break a campaign and underscores the importance of diplomacy to military effectiveness across the region. Despite his defeat, Stotzas found refuge with allies in Mauretania, where he bided his time over the next few years.<sup>191</sup>

The imperial administration re-established its position following the suppression of the first phase of the rebellion. Germanus was recalled in 539 and Solomon reinstated as the overall military commander with a new officer corps.<sup>192</sup> The restoration of taxation strengthened the financial position and doubtless helped to calm any lingering tensions within the army.<sup>193</sup> The victory at *Scalae Veterae* encouraged Solomon to renew the offensive in southern Numidia, which had been abandoned in 536; this would also have helped to re-establish imperial authority among the Moorish groups who had supported Stotzas.<sup>194</sup> In 540, Solomon sent a small force to the Aurès under the command of his bodyguard Guntharith, and then followed at the head of the main expeditionary army. Procopius describes these campaigns in a series of evocative sketches – the Moors' destruction of irrigation channels to flood Guntharith's advanced camp, their defeat in the field and flight to the distant regions of Mauretania, and a succession of Roman assaults on the strongpoints in the Aurès highlands.<sup>195</sup> Solomon's successes here were consolidated with further victories in eastern Mauretania. Although Procopius provides a much less detailed account of these campaigns, their achievements were evidently accomplished through diplomacy as much as military victories. The local leaders in Mauretania *Sitifensis* were made tributary, as was a certain Mastigas, the most important figure in the mountains around Caesarea, far to the west.<sup>196</sup> Procopius notes that

<sup>189</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.8–12, 31–3.

<sup>190</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.10. Compare for example *BV* I.25.9. This was not limited to the Moors. For the similar behaviour of the army during the Nika revolt, see Proc. *BP* I.24.39.

<sup>191</sup> Proc. *BV* II.17.35; Marc Com Add. a.536/7.3; Vict. Tun. a.541.2. Victor dates this to the consulship of Basil in 541.

<sup>192</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.1–4; Marc Com Add. a.538/9.5.      <sup>193</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.3–4.

<sup>194</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.5–20.29. On this campaign, see especially Morizot (1993) and Morizot (2006).

<sup>195</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.5–20.29.

<sup>196</sup> Proc. *BV* II.20.30–31. On the background, see Dahmani (1995); Hamdoun (2018), 322–5.

Solomon marked his strategic advances in southern Numidia and eastern Mauretania through the construction of military fortifications. Many of these have been identified around the Aurès and Hodna massifs and in the high plains around Setif.<sup>197</sup> These were clearly intended as a projection of imperial power, and included at least one settlement which bore the emperor's name, as we have seen. These advances took Byzantine power in North Africa to its maximum extent.<sup>198</sup>

Solomon's second prefecture (539–44) also represented an important phase in the fortification of the provincial heartlands of North Africa. As noted, the erection of city walls was a central part of the imperial programme of restoration, but beyond Belisarius' initial rebuilding of the Theodosian walls at Carthage, and some stop-gap repairs elsewhere, the first major phase of fortification took place only following Solomon's return to Africa.<sup>199</sup> Around fifteen town walls or fortresses can be confidently dated to this period from extant dedicatory inscriptions, and it is likely that many undated constructions of similar style were erected at the same time.<sup>200</sup> Modern analyses of this programme have conventionally focused on its likely strategic purpose, and concluded that the primary function of these fortifications was to allow for the defence of the surrounding agricultural lands (and their inhabitants) from the attacks of the Moors, or to secure crossroads against external raiders.<sup>201</sup> In the immediate context of the late 530s and 540s, however, the ideological impact of all of this construction certainly went beyond that. For the locals who lived in the fortified towns themselves, or the inhabitants of their hinterlands, the militarization of familiar civic spaces would have been a very clear manifestation of the protection afforded them in the name of the emperor. The redefinition of towns themselves from places of trade, social connection, government and worship into places of defence must also have reshaped

<sup>197</sup> Proc. *BV* II.20.22; *Buildings* VI.7.7–9. This defensive system has been well studied: compare Desanges (1963); N. Duval (1971); Morizot (1999); Laporte (2002); Trouset (2002); Hamdoun (2018), 321–2.

<sup>198</sup> Somewhat overstated by Diehl (1896), 91: 'Depuis la Tripolitaine jusqu'aux confins de la Maurétanie Césarienne, depuis la mer jusqu'à la région des Chotts, aux montagnes de l'Aurès et aux steppes du Hodna, l'antique province romaine d'Afrique reconnaissait la domination du très pieux empereur Justinien; au delà même, vers l'Occident, des places éparses sur la côte semblaient un point de départ pour de futures conquêtes et grâce à l'énergique valeur du patrice Salomon, les rêves de l'ambition impériale semblaient à la veille de se réaliser.'

<sup>199</sup> Durliat (1981); Pringle (1981), 27–8.

<sup>200</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.3–4; *Buildings* VI.6–17–7.11. Durliat (1981), 7–59; Pringle (1981), 315–16.

<sup>201</sup> Proc. *Buildings* VI.6.18 states as much. See the various interpretations of Diehl (1896), 138–298. See also Durliat (1981); Pringle (1981) (esp. 94–109); and the observations of Fevrier (1989), 84–8; Modéran (2003a), 596–604; Fernandi (2012); Lassère (2015), 701–2.

ideas of civic community, however gradually. Yet an equally powerful message would have been sent to the soldiers who garrisoned these defences, and who were probably largely responsible for their construction.<sup>202</sup> One of the circuits securely dated by an inscription to Solomon's second prefecture was at Gadiaufala.<sup>203</sup> The walls here are not the most imposing of this period and seem to have been built in some haste, but the local resonance of their construction would have been very clear: this was the spot where rebellious troops had recently murdered the *Dux Numidiae* and several of his ranking officers; just a few months later, loyal troops constructed an impressive monument to Roman military strength and dedicated this explicitly to the emperor and empress.<sup>204</sup> If city walls projected a proud message of imperial authority to the citizens and barbarians of North Africa, they were also addressed in part to the troops who defended them.<sup>205</sup>

### 543–546 Renewed Crises in Africa

In 543 and 544, a sequence of major military and political crises broke out across North Africa, which reignited the Stotzas revolt. The origins of this upheaval are far from clear, but it involved a poisonous combination of internal political tensions, active Byzantine incompetence and the gathering resentments (or ambitions) of Moorish leaders in southern Byzacium and Tripolitania. These problems were almost certainly magnified by the Justinianic plague, which was first recorded in the eastern Mediterranean in 542 and reached North Africa in 543, but the details of its impact remain opaque.<sup>206</sup>

The immediate political catalyst for the upheaval of the mid-540s was the coincidence of two diplomatic miscalculations made by Byzantine military commanders in different parts of the frontier zone at about the same time. In 543, Solomon's nephews Sergius and Cyrus were appointed as *Dux Tripolitanae* and *Dux Libyae Pentapoleos* respectively.<sup>207</sup> Since at

<sup>202</sup> See Moll (1860–1), 208–10, who estimates that the fortification of Theveste would have taken 800 to 850 workers some two years to complete (and probably involved soldiers, slaves, and locals working together). Compare Durliat (1981), 100–8, on fiscal implications.

<sup>203</sup> Durliat (1981), 44–5; Pringle (1981), 198. The dedicatory inscription firmly dates these fortifications to this period.

<sup>204</sup> Durliat (1981), 45.

<sup>205</sup> Compare Isaac (1992), 305–6, for a similar point about the intended audience of inscriptions on late Roman milestones.

<sup>206</sup> For scholarship on the plague in Africa, see Chapter 3.

<sup>207</sup> Proc. BV II.21.1. *PLRE* III Sergius 4, Cyrus 3.



least the fourth century, command in this theatre had primarily consisted of delicate negotiations with the various sedentary and transhumant groups who inhabited the wider frontier region, particularly the Syrtic coastal regions between the two provinces.<sup>208</sup> Thanks to the sheer scale of this frontier zone and the relatively small military forces available to the *duces*, local Moorish leaders had necessarily been incorporated into the maintenance of order in the region. A peaceful frontier would have been impossible without their collaboration. Over time, however, the social and economic balance of the region changed, and with it the political calculus of the frontier, frequently resulting in violence. This is clearest in the emergence of new groups or alliances in the Syrtic zone, identified as the Austuriani in our fourth-century sources and as Laguatan or Leuathai in the sixth century.<sup>209</sup> One such confederation had threatened the tenuous Vandal foothold in Lepcis in the 530s; in 543, a local aristocrat called Pudentius who had played a prominent role in that episode advised the *Dux Tripolitanae* that a further crisis was brewing, and a meeting was arranged between Sergius, Pudentius and the eighty representatives of the various Laguatan groups.<sup>210</sup>

Procopius provides two contrasting narratives of this meeting, but neither ended well for any of the protagonists.<sup>211</sup> Discussions initially ran smoothly and pledges were taken on both sides, but matters rapidly spiralled out of control. The talks collapsed, whether due to the aggression of the barbarians or the perfidy of Sergius, and all but one of the ambassadors were slaughtered. Their compatriots then turned to open warfare.<sup>212</sup> The Byzantines got the better of the first encounter, defeating the barbarians and plundering their camp, but Pudentius was killed in the struggle and Sergius was forced to take shelter in Lepcis.<sup>213</sup> The Laguatan then launched a major attack on Berenice and the cities of the Pentapolis in

<sup>208</sup> Mattingly (1995) provides an overview. Compare also the important studies of Troussel (1997), (2001) and (2011) which draw upon his extensive work in the region.

<sup>209</sup> Procopius refers to these groups as 'Leuathai', Corippus as 'Laguatan' (in different forms). In the present chapter, the terms will be used more or less interchangeably. The complex scholarship on this ethnography, particularly Corippus' language, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>210</sup> Proc. *BV* I.10.22–4; II.21.3; *Buildings*, VI.4.6. On Pudentius' role, see Modéran (2003a), 289–91.

<sup>211</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.3–15, 21–2; *SH* V.28.

<sup>212</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.7–8 implies that barbarian aggression was partly to blame (but Sergius' responsibility is scarcely disguised; indeed it is strongly suggested at II.21.21–2). By contrast, *SH* V.28 is explicit that Sergius was to blame. Procopius is consistently hostile to Sergius, but at best this must be read as an example of staggering diplomatic ineptitude (if not the psychopathy that the historian implies). In his paraphrase of Procopius, Theoph. AM 6026 208 is content to imply Sergius' responsibility.

<sup>213</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.13–15.



Cyrenaica, which led Cyrus to flee to his uncle in Carthage.<sup>214</sup> The following spring, the Moors attacked Byzacium.<sup>215</sup> By this time, Sergius had also joined Solomon, Cyrus and the main body of the African army. For the next four years, the Leuathai/Laguatan seem to have made repeated incursions during the summer grazing season without encountering serious opposition. On occasion they allied with Stotzas and the Moors of Byzacium and Numidia, but they seem to have retreated to the south during each winter grazing season.<sup>216</sup>

Solomon, meanwhile, had diplomatic problems of his own following the rebellion of the trusted imperial ally Antalas in 543 or 544. Antalas had been an important supporter of the imperial presence from the earliest days of Belisarius' occupation and was invaluable to peacekeeping within Byzacium. There is good reason to think that he assumed a more or less formal role in the hybrid military hierarchy of the frontier, and was probably the most important of the local allies envisaged in the imperial rescript of spring 534.<sup>217</sup> Certainly he remained a loyal agent of the empire during Solomon's campaigns against Iaudas and Cusina, and received tokens of office and a regular payment from the empire in return for his service. Procopius and Corippus both identify Solomon's murder of Antalas' brother Guarizila as the event that shattered relations between them, and this seems to have been accompanied by an ending of Antalas' military stipend.<sup>218</sup> The reasons for Solomon's actions here are not clear: Procopius states that Guarizila was accused of treachery and was killed to stem a developing crisis, but we have no further details.<sup>219</sup> Like the Laguatan a few months earlier, Antalas rebelled against those responsible, but his actions in doing so are also illuminating. According to Procopius, he repeatedly appealed directly to Justinian, declaring his loyalty and stating that he would return to the fold if only Solomon and Sergius were removed from their positions in the administration.<sup>220</sup> Antalas' first revolt thus clearly arose from a breakdown in the personal relationship between the African military commander (and Praetorian Prefect) and his prominent Moorish ally. This is significant.

<sup>214</sup> Theoph. AM. 6026–208. This episode is unattested in Procopius and apparently comes from an unknown second source. Nevertheless, the attack helps to explain Cyrus' presence in Solomon's entourage, which is noted at BV II.21.16. Modéran (2003a), 609–13, made this important connection.

<sup>215</sup> Proc. BV II.21.16–17. <sup>216</sup> Modéran (2003a), 620–9.

<sup>217</sup> Proc. BV I.9.3; II.25.2. Antalas' initial loyalty is stressed by both Corippus and Procopius. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

<sup>218</sup> Proc. BV II.21.17; *Ioh* IV.364–6. <sup>219</sup> Proc. BV II.21.17. <sup>220</sup> Proc. BV II.22.7–10.

The coincidence of Sergius' blundering treatment of the Laguatan and Solomon's alienation of Antalas proved catastrophic. In spring 544, the Laguatan moved north and reached an accord with Antalas – an unprecedented alliance of groups from different parts of the frontier world.<sup>221</sup> Solomon responded by mustering his field army, which included among its unit commanders both of his nephews and his former bodyguard Guntharith. The armies met between Thelepte and Cillium in the early summer of 544.<sup>222</sup> Solomon's attempts to negotiate with the barbarians were rejected outright, thanks to the atrocity at Lepcis in the previous year, and the sides came to blows.<sup>223</sup> Procopius states that Solomon had the better of an initial encounter but alienated some of his troops after he refused to allow them to plunder a captured Moorish camp. In a second engagement the following day, the Moors were victorious and Solomon was killed.<sup>224</sup> Corippus' narrative implies that this defeat was caused in part by Guntharith's flight during the battle, but whether this was an accurate account of events, a garbled echo of the hostility of some soldiers towards Solomon after the events of the previous day, or a retrojection of that officer's later disloyalty is not clear.<sup>225</sup>

Conspicuously, the African chronicler Victor of Tunnuna provides a rather different version of the events of this battle. In his account, it was the rebel Stotzas who was the principal agent of the conflict:

The tyrant Stuzas [Stotzas], having assembled a large number of *gentes*, confronted Solomon, who was *magister militum* and Patrician of Africa, and the other *duces* of the Roman army at Cillium. Here the clash took place, in which the Roman army was defeated because of the sins of Africa, and Solomon, a man powerful on both the civil and military side, fell in battle.<sup>226</sup>

Victor's statement that Stotzas rather than Antalas was the leader of the rebellious army is generally dismissed as simple confusion on the part of the

<sup>221</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.17–18. Modéran (2003a), 607–29, is much the best discussion (although I challenge some of his interpretations here and in later chapters).

<sup>222</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.16–19 gives Thelepte as the location; Vict. Tun. a.543 gives Cillium. The two cities were around twenty miles apart. For May–June 544 as the most probable date for the encounter, compare Stein (1959), 548, n. 1.

<sup>223</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.21–2. <sup>224</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.23–7.

<sup>225</sup> *Ioh* III.428–33. Proc. *BV* II.21.26 states that some Romans fled, but does not identify Guntharith specifically.

<sup>226</sup> Vict. Tun. a.543 [Pacanica 1997: 46]: *Stuzas tyrannus, gentium multitudine adunata, Solomoni magistri militiae ac Patricio Africae ceterisque Romanae militiae ducibus Cillio occurrit. Ubi congressione facta, peccatis Africae, Romanae rei publicae militia superatur, Solomon utriusque potestatis vir strenuus proelio moritur.*

chronicler, but his is the only source which locates the battle at Cillium, and he evidently drew upon some relatively reliable material.<sup>227</sup> His framing of the horrifying alliance of rebels and barbarians in religious terms gives some sense of its impact on the contemporary population, not least as the harbinger of further catastrophes. Ultimately, it is impossible to know which leader held overall command at Cillium, but it is clear that Stotzas had again become an important factor in the ongoing conflict by the summer of 544. He found common cause with Antalas, and may also have allied with the Syrtic groups at the same time.

This crisis was magnified by divisions on the imperial side. Following Solomon's death, Sergius became Praetorian Prefect, and assumed overall responsibility for the military in Africa.<sup>228</sup> Sergius was wildly unpopular across the African provinces and particularly detested by John, son of Sisiniolus, a senior commander within the army who had first come to the region under Solomon in 539.<sup>229</sup> As Sergius waited out the crisis in Carthage, and Antalas once more protested his loyalty to Constantinople, John scrambled to assemble the defences in Byzacium. During a chaotic period in the Summer of 544, the *Dux Byzacena*e Himerius was drawn out of the fortified city of Hadrumetum as he sought to reinforce John's army in the field.<sup>230</sup> This attempt failed, either through treachery within the Roman army or through miscommunication, and his forces were badly defeated in the plains of northern Byzacium.<sup>231</sup> More important, a significant proportion of the Roman army joined Stotzas, greatly increasing the threat of his revolt.<sup>232</sup> Hadrumetum also fell to the rebels. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the precise circumstances of this disaster are murky and different stories about the episode circulated, replete with themes of betrayal and extraordinary personal heroism. Hadrumetum was recovered relatively swiftly following the despatch of a small relief force from Carthage, amid news that Germanus had once more returned to Africa.<sup>233</sup> It seems possible that the majority of the garrison initially chose to side with the rebels, only to recant when rumours of the arrival of the emperor's nephew reached them, but the capture of the city had probably never been a serious strategic ambition on the part of Stotzas or Antalas in any case. By the end of 544, although Hadrumetum had been recovered and the Moors of Tripolitania and Syrtica

<sup>227</sup> On Victor's possible error here, see Placanica (1997), 120. *BV* II.22.5 states that Antalas summoned Stotzas from Mauretania after the victory at Cillium.

<sup>228</sup> Proc. *BV* II. 22.1–2; Marc Com Add. a 542/3.3. <sup>229</sup> Proc. *BV* II.22.2–3; II.23.32; *SH* V.28.

<sup>230</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.1–5.

<sup>231</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.6–10. Procopius' account is generally followed by scholars. For Corippus' contrasting treatment at *Ioh* IV.8–81, see Chapter 3.

<sup>232</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.10; *Ioh* IV.55–65. <sup>233</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.22–6.

returned to their winter grazing lands and oasis date harvests south of the frontier, the situation remained precarious.

The following spring, Athanasius arrived in Carthage as the new Praetorian Prefect. Alongside him were an inexperienced patrician named Areobindus, who was ordered to share military command with Sergius, and the Armenian prince Artabanes, who commanded a small detachment of his compatriots.<sup>234</sup> Procopius states that Areobindus was given command in Byzacium, while Sergius held authority in Numidia, presumably on the understanding that the two would provide mutual support. In the event, this did not happen, and both Procopius and Corippus refer to extensive ill feeling within the imperial army at this time.<sup>235</sup> In autumn 545, Areobindus ordered John, the son of Sisiniolus, to march against Antalas and Stotzas in Sicca Veneria in central Byzacium.<sup>236</sup> John commanded a select force, supported by a group of Armenians under Artabanes' brother (also called John), but the reinforcements expected from Sergius did not appear as a result of the long-standing enmity between the two men. In the battle that followed on the road to Carthage outside Thacia, Stotzas, John son of Sisiniolus, and John the Armenian were all killed.<sup>237</sup> Procopius and Corippus both acknowledge that the battle was a victory for the rebellious forces, but emphasize the heroic death of John son of Sisiniolus.<sup>238</sup> Stotzas was replaced as leader of the mutiny by yet another John, who took the name 'Stotzas Junior' and continued the rebellion in alliance with Antalas.<sup>239</sup> Following this further catastrophe, Sergius was recalled to Constantinople and Areobindus was given sole command over the African army. But a further crisis was looming.

### Guntharith's Rebellion (Winter 545/546)

This was the situation as it stood in late 545 or early 546, at the start of the Guntharith conspiracy.<sup>240</sup> Overall military authority in Africa rested with the inexperienced Areobindus, who was supported by

<sup>234</sup> Proc. *BV* II.24.1–3; *Iob* IV.82–6; *PLRE* III Areobindus 2; Athanasius 1.

<sup>235</sup> Proc. *BV* II.24.3–6; *SH* 5.31; *Iob* IV.86–102. This passage is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>236</sup> Proc. *BV* II.24.6. Stein (1959), 553, n. 1 dates this to August or September 535.

<sup>237</sup> Proc. *BV* II.10–15; Corippus *Iob* IV.103–200; Vict. Tun. a.546 locates this at the gates of Thacia (*portu Thaciae*).

<sup>238</sup> Proc. *BV* II.24.12; *Iob* IV.103–200.

<sup>239</sup> Proc. *BV* II.25.3 Jord. *Rom*, 384; Marc Com Add. a.544/5.2, 546/7.6; *PLRE* III Ioannes 35.

<sup>240</sup> Chronology: Partsch (1879), XXIV, followed by Diehl (1896), 350–8, and Bury (1923), II. 146. Compare Stein (1959), 553, n. 1 and Modéran (2003a), 622–9. Proc. *BV* II.25.1 dates the start of Guntharith's tyranny to two months after Sergius' recall from Africa, and at II.28.41 states that the usurper was killed in Justinian's nineteenth year, which provides a *terminus ante quem* of 1 April 546. Vict. Tun. a.546.2 corroborates this date, whereas Marcellinus Comes places it a year later.

Artabanus and his entourage. Guntharith was *Dux Numidiae* and Marcentius had replaced Himerius as *Dux Byzacena*, perhaps following the latter's disgrace after the debacle at Hadrumetum.<sup>241</sup> Athanasius was Praetorian Prefect, but effective imperial control over much of Byzacium and the south was compromised by the activity of the combined armies of Antalas and Stotzas Junior. Although the Laguatan from Tripolitania do not seem to have been a permanent part of this rebel alliance, they may well have returned to imperial territory each spring and were able to move unchecked during the summer grazing months.<sup>242</sup> Matters came to a head when Antalas and Stotzas Junior marched on Carthage at the same time as different groups of Numidian Moors led by Iudath and Cusina.<sup>243</sup> Procopius is explicit that Guntharith had secretly orchestrated this combined offensive in the hope of luring Areobindus into the field, forcing his defeat and taking command of the imperial forces.<sup>244</sup> The historian describes how Guntharith sent his spearman Ulitheus to promise formal recognition for Antalas as part of this process:

So Ulitheus, without the rest of the barbarians knowing it, made an agreement with Antalas that Antalas would rule Byzacium, having half of the possessions of Areobindus and taking with him fifteen hundred Roman soldiers, while Guntharith would assume the dignity of the emperor and hold power over Carthage and the rest of Libya.<sup>245</sup>

The plots and counterplots which followed were labyrinthine. Areobindus, still unaware of Guntharith's treachery, made his own approaches to Cusina, and perhaps to Stotzas Junior too, in the hope of turning them against Antalas.<sup>246</sup> Guntharith advised him against this strategy and warned Antalas of Cusina's shifting loyalties.<sup>247</sup> As Procopius reports it, the situation had all of the makings of a grim military farce – a treacherous imperial general preparing to take the field against two barbarian leaders, both of whom were secretly (and separately) in cahoots with different parts of the Roman administration. But as the threat of a Moorish attack on Carthage loomed, Guntharith's plotting finally came to light and he set about winning the city garrison to his cause by claiming that Areobindus was planning to leave Africa with their promised pay. After a brief skirmish,

<sup>241</sup> *PLRE* III Himerius, Marcentius. <sup>242</sup> Modéran (2003a), 620–9. <sup>243</sup> Proc. *BVII*.25.1–3.

<sup>244</sup> Proc. *BVII*.25.22. <sup>245</sup> Proc. *BVII*.25.10. tr. Kaldellis.

<sup>246</sup> Marc Com Add. a. 546/7.6. implies that Areobindus approached Stotzas and the rebels; Jord. *Rom* 384 states that Stotzas approached Guntharith and encouraged him to rebel.

<sup>247</sup> Proc. *BVII*.25.15–19.

Areobindus sought refuge in a Carthaginian church and Artabanes disappeared, leaving Guntharith to claim power for himself.<sup>248</sup>

Guntharith's thirty-six days of rule did not transform the political balance of imperial Africa, but it did reveal the weaknesses of the system, not least in exposing the complicity of many prominent members of the administration with the usurper. This was apparent from the outset. Following promises of leniency, Areobindus was brought out of sanctuary by Reparatus, the Archbishop of Carthage, only to be put to death soon afterwards.<sup>249</sup> The Praetorian Prefect Athanasius and Artabanes, the leader of the Armenian detachment, both pledged themselves to Guntharith, although Procopius states that Artabanes was secretly plotting against the usurper and Corippus implies the same about Athanasius.<sup>250</sup> But the fact that both survived the purges of Guntharith's bloody month in power, while remaining members of his inner circle suggests that they hid their alleged misgivings well.<sup>251</sup> Stotzas Junior, in command of around 1,000 mutinous troops, and Cusina also declared their loyalty to Guntharith, and the latter gave members of his family as hostages.<sup>252</sup> Antalas, by contrast, received neither the money nor the position that he had been promised and turned against the usurper. Once more, he proclaimed his loyalty to Justinian and sought alliance with the loyal *Dux Byzacenaë* Marcentius, who had taken refuge on an island offshore.<sup>253</sup> A short and indecisive campaign followed which again reveals the complexities of political loyalty in this period of rampant treachery: one army under Artabanes, Stotzas Junior and Guntharith's bodyguard Ulitheus (with the support of Cusina), marched against Antalas, who had declared for the emperor, and drove him to flight.<sup>254</sup>

Guntharith was assassinated at a banquet following a plot orchestrated by Artabanes (according to Procopius and the chroniclers), Athanasius (as Corippus has it), or perhaps both.<sup>255</sup> Following the uproar in the palace, many rebels immediately pledged their loyalty to the emperor; those who did not were killed, while several ringleaders in the mutiny, including Stotzas Junior, were taken prisoner.<sup>256</sup> Athanasius remained in office as

<sup>248</sup> Proc. *BV* II.25.25–26.20.    <sup>249</sup> Proc. *BV* II.26.23–33.    <sup>250</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.9–19.

<sup>251</sup> Purges: Proc. *BV* II.27.37–8; the fact that both Athanasius and Artabanes were present at Guntharith's final banquet in *BV* II.28.1–21 reveals that they were members of the usurper's inner circle.

<sup>252</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.24. (Cusina) 7, 25 (Stotzas Jr).    <sup>253</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.1–6.

<sup>254</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.25–38.

<sup>255</sup> Proc. *BV* II.28.29–30 and *BG* III.32.6 are clear that this was Artabanes' doing; Marc Com Add. a. 546/7.6; Vict. Tun. a.546.2; Jord. *Rom* 384.

<sup>256</sup> Marc Com Add. a. 546/7.6; Jord. *Rom* 384.

Praetorian Prefect, and Artabanes was briefly given supreme military command in Africa, but requested a recall to Constantinople for personal reasons: two years later, he would be implicated in a separate plot against Justinian.<sup>257</sup> This was the situation as it stood in late 546, then, at the time of John Troglita's arrival in Africa. Carthage was recovering from the bloody aftermath of Guntharith's coup and the political climate was strained. Antalas had initially allied with Guntharith but had turned against him; Cusina had been a favourite of Areobindus only to support his murder.

### Unpicking the Narrative

Intricate as this narrative is, certain recurrent themes within it are readily apparent. Perhaps the most obvious is that this was indeed a complex passage of political, social and military history, certain details of which remained obscure even to contemporary observers. This is particularly evident in the circulation of contradictory narratives – whether over the events which took place in Lepcis in 543, the precise circumstances of the fall and recovery of Hadrumetum in 544, the timing of the alliance between Antalas and Stotzas in the same year, or the involvement of Stotzas' successor in Guntharith's rising – some which will be examined further in Chapter 3. Although they differ in their details, all the extant sources nevertheless agree in their essential assumption that the crisis in North Africa resulted from internal mismanagement and mutiny rather than sustained external threat. Procopius' *Vandal War* and *Secret History* both detail internecine squabbling just as frequently as campaigning against the Moors, and often see them as inseparable. The chroniclers are far more interested in civil conflict than any other sphere of military activity in Africa. We might suspect that Stotzas and Guntharith were much more familiar names to audiences in Carthage (and Constantinople) than were Antalas, Iaudas or Cusina.

The events of 534–46 illuminate the extent to which Moorish military activity was inseparable from the internal political crises of the African provinces. In some cases, 'Moorish' aggression arose directly from the failure of Byzantine diplomacy.<sup>258</sup> This seems to have been the situation

<sup>257</sup> *PLRE III* Artabanes 2.

<sup>258</sup> Contra Vössing (2010), 205–8, who argues that the principal problem facing the Byzantines was their failure to engage diplomatically with their Moorish neighbours until after 548. It seems more likely that the problem was caused by fragmented and inconsistent diplomacy rather than its absence.

in the aftermath of Belisarius' departure in 534; it was certainly so after the twin catastrophes at Lepcis in 543 and the murder of Antalas' brother in 544. In these instances, prolonged conflict happened only because the imperial representatives failed to keep to diplomatic agreements, as was repeatedly pointed out by the aggrieved Moors in the periods that followed. Whether this was the result of personal incompetence or wider changes in strategic policy, the results were disastrous. In other cases, Moorish aggression can be seen as the result of *successful* diplomatic overtures, when rebels or usurpers mobilized local groups to support their own claims to power. This is most obvious in Guntharith's mobilization of Antalas and Cusina in summer 545, but may also be identified in Stotzas' dependence on Moorish allies first in 536–7 and then again in 544–5. Even Solomon's intervention in Numidia in 535 was bound up in diplomatic activity in the region – between Iaudas and the regional military commander, and between Solomon and Iaudas' local rivals. What we do not see in any of our sources is any suggestion that the 'Roman' and 'barbarian' worlds were dichotomously and implacably opposed in this period, that the Moors represented a constant military threat to the frontier regions that was immune to diplomatic solution, or indeed that the principal challenge to stable Byzantine rule in Africa came from beyond its own frontiers.

This emphasis on structural weakness within the imperial administration risks negating the agency of 'Moorish' groups within unfolding events, but is preferable to assuming the existence of a constant and insatiable barbarian threat to the African provinces. While contemporary writers turned more readily to the incompetence or self-interest of Roman commanders to explain defeats, we should be wary of following them too closely in this.<sup>259</sup> Such cognitive frames had little space to allow for social and economic pressures which motivated different population groups, such as shifts in seasonal grazing practices or the wider migratory patterns in this period, and the relative silence of our sources on these issues should not preclude consideration of such factors. While this imbalance will be redressed somewhat in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the current book, it is important to emphasize at the outset that the Moorish actors in this drama were not an undifferentiated mass. Some leaders sought preferment in the imperial system while some consciously placed themselves outside it; most probably shifted between these positions as circumstances changed. For those living close to the provincial heartlands of Numidia or Byzacium, the reality of imperial power would have been inescapable, whereas the

<sup>259</sup> Brodka (2004), 138–45.



inhabitants of Syrtica east of Tripolitania, or in the pre-desert and oases to the south would have enjoyed far greater autonomy, albeit within a world that was always tied in some ways to the cultivated lands and the coast. We should resist the temptation to present these groups in homogeneous terms, or indeed to assume that our sources necessarily did so. Even Corippus, who is often accused in the modern scholarship of having a deeply partisan view of the Moorish world, was much more nuanced in his treatment of it than is frequently assumed.<sup>260</sup> Chapter 3 discusses his narrative of the period from 533 to 546 and shows that the poet does not present the Moors as the sole cause of Africa's ills. Chapter 4 assesses his careful presentation of allied and hostile Moors and the importance of this distinction to the political philosophy which underscores the *Iohannis*.

As we have seen, the military stability of North Africa was significantly compromised by the distributed nature of authority across a vast area, and by internal tensions between different parts of the administration, but the recurrent problems of army supply and pay are also worth emphasizing. The issue of pay was central to all of the major mutinies of the period and provided a bedrock of generalized military resentment. As Procopius put it in the *Secret History* (with specific reference to Africa):

[Justinian] was always late in paying his soldiers and, generally, treated them in a heavy-handed way. This caused many revolts that resulted in widespread devastation.<sup>261</sup>

A desire for pay always featured prominently among the rebels' demands, and the failure to fulfil it was regarded by Procopius as a major weakness of the African administration.<sup>262</sup> No less significant, the promise of the restoration of pay (or even better, actual payment) seems to have been the most effective means of defusing tensions within the ranks. In 536, the officer Martinus was sent to Numidia to bring the troops back on side with money (though in this case the initiative failed); Belisarius won back control of the Carthage garrison by paying them, even when his own military support was very small; Germanus similarly promised pay to revolting soldiers in order to bring them back to the standards.<sup>263</sup> These problems were not unique to North Africa and mutinies became endemic

<sup>260</sup> See for example Tommasi Moreschini (2002a), 169, and Tommasi Moreschini (2002b), 271.

<sup>261</sup> Proc. *SH* XVIII.11, tr. Kaldellis.

<sup>262</sup> Proc. *BV* II.15.55 (Stotzas); II.19.9 (Maximinus). Kaegi (1981), 42–3, and compare Treadgold (1995), 204; Vössing (2010), 209–10. On pay structures more generally, see Treadgold (1995), 118–57.

<sup>263</sup> Proc. *BV* II.14.40 (Martinus); II.15.11 (Belisarius); II.16.5. (Germanus). Compare similar patterns in Italy in *BG* III.6.6–7; III.11.13–16; III.36.7–26; IV.26.5–6.

in the middle years of the sixth century. As North Africa was a relatively under-militarized region which was only rarely at the forefront of the emperor's attention after the glorious triumph of 533/4, the soldiers stationed there probably suffered more than most.<sup>264</sup>

Justinian instituted a number of initiatives to bring military pay under control, but these probably did more to exacerbate tensions than to alleviate them, and are a reminder of the sorts of abuses that were endemic in a premodern army.<sup>265</sup> They also hint at the very real danger that a mutinous and underpaid army could pose to the civilian population of a region under occupation. Several of the African laws refer to Justinian's determination to stamp out common forms of military corruption, but this may merely have stirred resentment among the troops without much benefit to the state.<sup>266</sup> Contemporary commentators viewed administrative innovations sceptically, and Procopius probably represents a common view from the officers' mess: the hated bureaucrats of the new imperial regime were often accused of skimming military pay, or of fattening their own purses at the cost of the fighting men in a variety of ways.<sup>267</sup> Imperial auditors were particularly blamed for exacerbating pay arrears and became the focus of hatred among the front-line troops.<sup>268</sup> In Africa specifically, attempts to curb abuses were coupled with resentment about the fair division of the spoils of the Vandal war. As we have seen, the allocation of Vandal estates offer one example of how the interests of the soldiery contrasted with that of the imperial administration, but similar tensions arose over other forms of plunder and booty.<sup>269</sup>

Justinian was also keen to limit the military exploitation of the civilian population and to curb the sort of requisitioning that was illegal but had probably always been widespread.<sup>270</sup> At the time of his landing in 533, Belisarius stressed precisely this point and was at pains to punish transgressors publicly: whether or not this really happened, Procopius' inclusion of this episode testifies to its importance in the official narrative.<sup>271</sup> Yet despite

<sup>264</sup> Jones (1964), 677–8; Proc. *BG* III.6.6–7; III.11.13–16; III.36.7–26; *BG* IV.26.5–6, and see also Lee (2007), 72–3.

<sup>265</sup> Whitby (1995), 86. Isaac (1992), 282–304, discusses the nature of military requisitioning and taxation (and their impact in the provinces). Janniard (2021) is an important recent discussion with an overview of different scholarly approaches at pages 501–4.

<sup>266</sup> Kaegi (1981), 43–4. On *commeatatus* and *stellatura*, see especially Puliatti (1980), 111ff.

<sup>267</sup> Compare for example *SH* XXIV.12–22.

<sup>268</sup> Agathias V.14.1–4 on Justinian's neglect of the army, the misdeeds of auditors sent out by Justinian, and arrears in pay (all of which he regards as the main causes behind the decline of the army). Proc. *BG* III.1.28–33 on the particular abuses of Alexander – a military auditor sent to Italy in 542.

<sup>269</sup> Compare Proc. *BV* II.1.10–11; II.14.10; II.15.33, 56. <sup>270</sup> *CJ* 1.27.2.8, 9a–b, 11.

<sup>271</sup> Proc. *BV* I.16.1–8.

such efforts, the military presence was still acutely felt by those on the ground, and its impositions are likely to have increased substantially in periods when formal channels of pay were closed and the traditional hierarchical structures were eroded by mutiny. Ferrandus' letter of advice to the *Comes* Reginus is a reminder of this point: he is emphatic that a major responsibility of an officer was to limit requisitions on the part of his men, which may hint at an endemic problem. A further clue is provided by a peculiar epigram from the *Latin Anthology*, which mocks an officer who was not only enriching himself at the cost of his men, but making money on the side by acting as a pimp.<sup>272</sup> While the date of this poem is not certain, its seedy implications of military corruption would fit well with the febrile atmosphere of early Byzantine Carthage, and it is certainly possible that it was written in this period.<sup>273</sup>

### Conclusions

By the later 540s, the inhabitants of Carthage and its surrounding territories were living in a region scarred by a decade of more or less constant war. In its earliest months the ongoing conflict had been represented as the consolidation of imperial authority. Expeditions penetrated the distant 'Moorish' lands of Numidia or Mauretania, and new walls purported to defend the cities and hinterlands of Tripolitania or Byzacium from the incursions of pastoralists from Syrtica, the pre-desert and the oases beyond. The memory of such initiatives is likely to have been fading by the time of John Troglita's arrival in 546. The more recent devastations by African warlords were entirely the creation of internal disarray within the imperial system. When Antalas or Cusina approached the walls of Carthage it was as a supporter of one or other pretender to imperial authority in the city – or as a defender of the emperor's own representatives. And for the citizens of the African cities and their immediate hinterlands, the actions of these Numidian and Byzacian leaders may have been no more terrifying than the similar revolts, mutinies or military actions of the Huns, Heruls, Armenians or Thracians who made up the Byzantine garrisons and comprised the conflicting factions which formed and reformed in the names of innumerable rebellions throughout the period.

<sup>272</sup> *AL S* 117 (R 128); Kay (2006), 200–5.

<sup>273</sup> On the possible early Byzantine date of *AL S* 89 (R 100), see Kay (2006), 94–7. *AL S* 116 (R 127) (on a spineless *graeculus* who pimps his own wife, which is a pendant with *AL S* 117 (R 128)) may also have been a satire of the new Greek elite, and plausibly even a veiled allusion to Belisarius (whose difficulties with Antonia are amply documented by Procopius).

Local pessimism can only have been intensified by the inauspicious signs and portents which added to the misery, such as the year without a sun of 536/7 and the devastating plague of 542/3. We know very little about the effects of the plague in Africa, but it was sufficiently dramatic to be remembered with horror almost a decade later, and there is little reason to think that Africa suffered any less than other regions around the Mediterranean. We can only guess at the miserable effects of these events on the society and economy of early Byzantine North Africa, although there is little reason to think that the region was in a happy state at the time of John Troglita's arrival, or that these manifold miseries were primarily caused by (or blamed upon) the Moorish wars of the period. If North Africa was in a state of crisis – and there is every reason to think that it was – it was the result of internal military disarray and external natural phenomena as much as the Moorish problem. But at least the Moors provided an enemy that John could fight. This concept was key to his political strategy and (as we shall see) to the epic which celebrated his campaigns.

*Past and Future in the Iohannis*

In the modesty topos which opens the *Iohannis*, Corippus implies that his greatest difficulty was creating Latin verses worthy of his hero: while John Troglita surpassed Aeneas in his deeds, his poet could scarcely hope to emulate Virgil in his celebration of them.<sup>1</sup> Yet as Corippus was a citizen of imperial Carthage as well as a poet, the navigation of the troubling political reality of the world around him arguably represented a greater challenge. After his short celebration of John and Justinian in Book I, Corippus goes on to describe the African catastrophe in 546 – the plundered land, the corpses skewered with swords and the impossible scale:

The noble and the poor were all overcome by the same fate. Tears echoed everywhere, anguished terror ran through all, and everything was shaken with dreadful dangers. Who could set in order the tears, the slaughter, the plunder, the fires, the deaths, the treachery, the lamentations, the torment, the pillage and enslavement, or enumerate the wretched sorrows? Africa, the third part of the world, was perishing in smoking flames.<sup>2</sup>

This was more than a mere poetic conceit. Over the course of his epic, Corippus sought to explain the tragedy of imperial North Africa and unpack its ‘impenetrable disasters’, but to do so in a way that placed them firmly in the past, and made it clear that John’s actions had resolved them all. But in order to celebrate the general’s successes appropriately, the poet first needed to establish what was at stake, thereby creating the challenge his hero would overcome. This seemingly straightforward task – a basic ingredient of any heroic narrative, after all – was complicated by the fact that Corippus was writing about the very recent past for an audience that remembered these events all too vividly. The

<sup>1</sup> *Ioh* Proem 11–16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ioh* 1.41–7: *nobilis et pauper casu rapiuntur in uno; | luctus ubique sonat, terror tristisque per omnes | it metus et diris turbantur cuncta periculis. | quis lacrimas clades praedas incendia mortes | insidias gemitus tormentum uincula raptus | explicet aut miseros possit numerare dolores? | tertia pars mundi fumans perit Africa flammis.*

poet told of events ‘not unknown’ to Carthaginians still smarting from the worst of these disasters, even as the triumphal bunting still hung in their home city.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the unfolding present in which he and his immediate public lived was not easily separable from the conflagrations of the recent past: key figures still held power in the borderlands, old administrators were still in office and cultural tensions lingered. Corippus’ epic was important not merely for demonstrating *that* John’s campaigns of 546–8 had been successful – which in the aftermath of the final victory would have been clear enough to contemporaries – but it was also crucial for explaining *why* these victories were meaningful in the wider context of African history. In order to achieve that aim, Corippus had to confront the cataclysm of the earlier period – tears, destruction, spoils, conflagrations, murders, treachery and all – and relate these to the happier outcome of the fighting that followed. Hyperbolic celebration of John’s victories could go only so far in demonstrating that John had indeed brought lasting peace to Africa.

The fact that Corippus chose to fashion his *Iohannis* as a historical epic was crucial to his pursuit of this aim. In the proem, the poet declares that he was compelled to song by ‘a series of very rich deeds’ (*series ditissima rerum*).<sup>4</sup> This conceptualization of John’s accomplishments as a connected sequence distinguished an epic formulation from the disjointed fragments that were more common in late antique panegyric and shorter poetry.<sup>5</sup> The conventions of epic demanded that John’s actions be set within their wider narrative context, relating them both to the comparatively impoverished deeds which had preceded his landing and to the events that followed his final victory in 548. Latin historical epic had well-developed practices for the exploration of these different temporal registers, and these differed in important ways from approaches taken in contemporary prose historiography.<sup>6</sup> Corippus was steeped in this literary inheritance, and many of his narratological techniques were closely modelled on Virgil in particular, but he could not emulate his predecessors unthinkingly. As a late antique poet, Corippus was also influenced by recent work, not least in panegyric and biblical epic.<sup>7</sup> In reflecting on the very recent past, moreover, the poet was forced to adopt new strategies to unfold the historical significance of his primary narrative.

<sup>3</sup> *Ioh* VII.397: *non ignota cano*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ioh*. Proem 22: *conciat ad cantus series ditissima rerum*. Zarini (2003), 65–82.

<sup>5</sup> On late antique poetics and the fragmentary aesthetic of the period, see especially Roberts (1989) and Peltari (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Compare especially Leigh (2008); Fowler (2019).

<sup>7</sup> See especially Hofmann (1988); Hofmann (1989); Galand-Hallyn (1993); Hadjú (2001); Tommasi Moreschini (2001b).

Understanding Corippus as an epic poet, and not simply as a panegyrist or historiographer who happened to write in verse, is crucial to the appreciation of his representation of the North African past, and consequently to the use of the *Iohannis* as a historical source. Corippus is very commonly assumed to have viewed African history in simplistic terms: the *Iohannis* is often read (or even dismissed) as a long panegyric which presents the recent past with strongly imperial leanings.<sup>8</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, the poem is often read as part of the choral celebration of Justinianic power, with little attention paid to the dissonant notes it often strikes. While Corippus' treatment of John's campaigns of 546–8 is often very positive, his tone elsewhere is much more ambivalent. This is particularly true in the long retrospective narrative of Books III–IV and the passages which relate to it. Here, the poet is more sceptical towards the imperial occupation and presents the recent past in terms which frequently contradict the approved agendas of the imperial centre. His treatment of this difficult ground, effected through a range of narrative voices and several different temporal registers, is vital to the appreciation of the significance of the poem as a whole. Corippus' *Iohannis* not only made the past *epic*, it also made the past *past*, and placed John's successes within an appropriate context.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the narrative of the *Iohannis* is concerned with the military campaigns which took place between 546 and 548. This narrative is explicitly addressed to the assembled dignitaries of Carthage, in the context of the celebration of John's victories: these are the primary 'narratees' of the poem and remain so regardless of whether the *Iohannis* was actually performed in these circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Corippus varies his approach considerably over the course of his work and several important studies have highlighted his narratological techniques, particularly in relation to those of earlier writers.<sup>11</sup> Books I–V of the *Iohannis*, for example, are broadly concerned with the first campaigning season, mostly concentrated on a handful of days (and one night) around the battle of Antonia Castra in autumn 546. By contrast, Books VI–VIII cover almost two years (late 546–mid-548), but the account is again telescoped into detailed descriptions of specific conflicts,

<sup>8</sup> Cameron (1982), 39–40; Zarini (2010), 100, and see Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> The significance of a distinct epic past is explored in Bakhtin (1981), 16–35. For complications of this view in the Latin tradition, see Quint (1992), 45–6, and Rossi (2004), 1–13.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Hofmann (1988), 130–2, on the complicity of narrator and narratees in the text (though his conclusions differ from my own). See Peltari (2014), 45–72, on the role of prefaces in fashioning implied audiences in late antique poetry. Compare also Vinchesi (1998), 204; Zarini (2003), 9–10; Kern (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Hajdú (2001) and Zarini (2003) are essential.

where hundreds of lines are concerned with the actions of only a few minutes or hours.<sup>12</sup> As we might expect, there is considerable variety even within these passages, and scholars have explored at length the narrative structure of Corippus' battle accounts, oracle episodes and Christian prayers.<sup>13</sup> For the most part, these narratives are recounted in an impersonal third person, as was the case in many Latin historical epics. Corippus does interject an authorial voice in the first person rather more than the epicists of the early empire, particularly in apostrophes to God or in lamentations for the sinfulness of man, and these probably betray the influence of more recent poetic taste.<sup>14</sup> Like his predecessors, Corippus also occasionally deploys moments of metalepsis – that is, points at which the narrator (or occasionally characters) reflect on the poem in which they appear.<sup>15</sup> The implications of some of these passages will be explored in more detail in the discussion of prolepses at the end of this chapter.

The two major temporal ruptures in Latin epic narrative came either through analepses ('flashbacks' to earlier events), or prolepses ('flash forwards', or anticipations of events *after* the primary narrative which may include the moment of a poem's performance, or even the distant future).<sup>16</sup> These approaches are deployed extensively in the *Iohannis*, both for narrative variety and as a means of situating the events of the primary narrative in their historical context.<sup>17</sup> When analepses and prolepses are presented in a different voice to that of the primary narrative, these are termed secondary narratives (or tertiary narratives when they embed further digressions of their own). Where they are also addressed to specific audiences, these are termed secondary (or tertiary) narratees.<sup>18</sup> The study that follows will not dwell excessively on the technical vocabulary of narratological analysis, but this terminology is often helpful, especially when confronting the layered accounts in Corippus' work and reflecting on their interdependence. This

<sup>12</sup> Zarini (2003), 70–1.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Schindler (2009), 227–73, and Caramico (2015) (battle narratives); Zarini (1996) (oracles); Ramirez-Tirado (1988) and Tommasi Moreschini (2004–5) (Christian prayers) and the further discussion in Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>14</sup> Compare for example *Ioh* I.1–7; I.23–6; I.501–8; II.36–7, II.84; II.112; II.138–40; IV.484–6; IV.590–3; V.499–502; VI.149–51; VI.176–87; VI.481; VII.212–18; VIII.54; VIII.310–17; VIII.527–33. See also Zarini (2003), 19–20. Hofmann (1988), 117–25 regards this as a late antique phenomenon.

<sup>15</sup> *Ioh* II.23–7; VI.339–41; 507–9 VII.397; VIII.507–9; VIII.531–3; Zarini (2003), 63–5.

<sup>16</sup> See De Jong (2014) for definitions and examples of the different forms these could take. Fowler (2019) is a clear overview of the applications in *Aeneid*.

<sup>17</sup> Zarini (2003), 70–7, surveys the territory.

<sup>18</sup> See De Jong (2014) on the terminology, and see also the essential studies of Genette (1980) and Bal (1985).



chapter will focus particularly on Corippus' use of such layering to position the events of 546–8 within the unfolding story of Byzantine Africa.

Chapter 2 responded to the challenge Gentius laid down in Book III of the *Iohannis* and sought to illuminate the events leading up to 546 that were 'completely shrouded in impenetrable darkness'; this chapter begins by looking at how Corippus approached the same problem. His principal medium for this was the long analeptic digression which occupies much of Books III–IV. It is here that Corippus considers the successes and failures of the Byzantine administration in the most detail, and often provides historical details or perspectives which would otherwise be lost to us. This long flashback is presented in the voice of an African officer named Liberatus (also identified by the patronymic Caecilides within the poem), and is ostensibly addressed to John and the assembled officers of his army in 546.<sup>19</sup> The analepsis covers the main events in North Africa between the turn of the sixth century and John's landing in 546, with a particular focus on the period after about 530. The literary function of this digression has been widely recognized in the scholarship, not least in its anticipation of some of the key themes developed in the primary narrative. The heroic actions (and especially the death) of John son of Sisiniolus anticipate his namesake, John Troglita, and prepare the ground for him: the new general will succeed where his predecessors had fallen short.<sup>20</sup> But this comes at the cost of admitting the problems faced by the army of occupation, in the course of which other imperial commanders are presented much less warmly.<sup>21</sup> Liberatus' account is both less positive about the occupation and rather less coherent than is often assumed. It takes the form of a jumble of reflective nostalgia and moments of genuine anguish, in which elaborate set pieces are interspersed with quite hasty summaries of complex political episodes.

Liberatus' narrative is then complicated by two further analepses, which are addressed to the same audience but contest his interpretation of the recent upheavals in Africa. The first of these is the account of Antalas, presented in the report of a Roman envoy called Amantius; the second is the summary interpretation of John himself.<sup>22</sup> In the latter, John appeals to the principle of *parcere subiectis* as the basis of Roman power, and to the idea that alliances must be honoured and enemies defeated. It was deviation from this rule, he argues, that had led to the problems Africa faced. By extension, his own

<sup>19</sup> Caecilides at *Ioh* III.47; VII.375, 475.

<sup>20</sup> *Ioh*. IV.102–35, 191–204. On these parallels, see especially Zarini (2003), 55; Dorfbauer (2007); Goldlust (2017), 43–4.

<sup>21</sup> Solomon's death at *Ioh* III.440–1, for example, is pitiful and heralds political chaos.

<sup>22</sup> *Ioh* IV.358–92; IV.407–56.

adherence to this philosophy will underscore his own actions on campaign and ensure the lasting nature of his victory. Corippus then returns to this earlier period for a final time in a short aside at the start of Book VI.<sup>23</sup> Here, the same events are viewed from the perspective of the Carthaginian citizens as they reflect on the triumphal celebrations of late 546. These figures are analogous to the audience of the *Iohannis* as a whole, and their viewpoint both corroborates John's interpretation of the preceding period and confirms the success of the measures he had put in place to solve these difficulties.

Read in sequence, these analepses outline the chaos of the preceding period from a range of different perspectives. More importantly, they establish the parameters for John's later actions – whether in fighting or through the honouring of alliances – and how they will bring this unhappy period to an end. The ultimate success of John's campaigns is never in question, of course, and the second half of this chapter explores how Corippus looked forward to the victory celebrations of which his own epic was a part. He accomplished this through a number of prolepses which anticipate the resolution of the fighting. The most important of these are the frequent allusions to the triumphal ceremony which lay in the future, beyond the primary narrative of the *Iohannis*, but which was where the 'story' of John's campaigns reached its resolution. These references recur throughout the epic from the proem to the final scenes, and effectively combine the unfolding narrative of John's expeditions, their final victorious conclusion and ultimately the composition and performance of the poem itself, into connected manifestations of John's success. Other prolepses confirm this metanarrative in surprising ways, not least the visions of two Moorish oracles, which Corippus recounts in detail in Books III and VI. Ostensibly, these prophecies articulate counterfactual narratives in which the barbarians will emerge victorious over the Romans and are recognized as factors driving their revolts. However, Corippus' authorial glosses redirect these prolepses to the 'correct' future, so that they further emphasize the inevitability of John's victories. If the bulk of the narrative of the *Iohannis* is concerned with the events of 546–8, then the deviations from this narrative framework give the campaigns their meaning.

### **Liberatus' Digression: *Iohannis* III.52–IV.246**

The events leading up to the beginning of John's campaign are covered in a long historical digression presented in the voice of the African military tribune Liberatus, an officer in John Troglita's army who had witnessed

<sup>23</sup> *Ioh* VI.69–73.

many of the events he describes. Liberatus was almost certainly a living person, and he describes various episodes in which he was directly involved, including the military chaos at the time of the fall of Hadrumetum and a mission to Iunci, in a second (much shorter) digression in Book VII.<sup>24</sup> The historical Liberatus was probably an important informant for Corippus, but the presentation of this material was clearly the poet's own. The implied audience of Liberatus' digression (the 'secondary narratees') consists of John and the assembled officers of his field army, assembled prior to the battle of Antonia Castra in 546.<sup>25</sup> Some of these soldiers would have experienced for themselves the events Liberatus describes (one of them, Marturius, is named as a participant). John was present for some events and not others; other soldiers would have newly arrived in Africa. The digression was also indirectly addressed to the audience of the *Iohannis* (the primary narratees of the poem) – that is, to the *proceres* of Carthage and the inhabitants of sixth-century Africa. Here too Liberatus was 'speaking' to an audience who had themselves experienced many of the episodes included in the digression. This narratological tangle is further confused by the likely presence of the historical Liberatus (as well as John and his officers) among these primary narratees. Here, 'Liberatus' is both storyteller and audience, with Corippus ostensibly acting as intermediary.

Presenting long analeptic passages from the perspective of an individual character was common in Latin epic, but the use of a living figure in this way was more unusual.<sup>26</sup> While this would presumably have limited Corippus' freedom in shaping his account (it is hard to escape the image of the poet casting nervous glances at Liberatus in his audience as he assumed the tribune's voice), it is clear that the analepsis as it stands was crafted to fit the poet's literary intentions. Liberatus could not have personally witnessed the Moorish prophecy at the time of Antalas' birth, for example, which he relates at length, or indeed the battle at the end of the Vandal kingdom. Peculiar as it may seem, this dramatic ventriloquism also had important implications for the politics of Corippus' poem. 'Liberatus' spoke with the authority of a witness to – and participant in – the events he described. As a distinct voice within the epic, moreover, the tribune was also free to articulate uncertainties and

<sup>24</sup> *Ioh* VII.475–97. *PLRE* III Liberatus assumes that he was a historical figure (as seems justified).

<sup>25</sup> *Ioh* III.5–51.

<sup>26</sup> Claudian's poems include direct speech from living figures, but these are rarely extended narratives and none is anything like as long as Liberatus' analepsis. Compare for example *Bell Gild*, 380–414 and *Bell Get*, 560–578 (with Stilicho as the speaker in each case).

criticisms of the imperial presence in Africa in ways which were not available to a primary narrator, particularly given the panegyric tone adopted at other moments in the epic. As a character (and presumably as an officer), Liberatus was by no means opposed to the occupation, but he allowed Corippus to articulate a view of the recent past from the perspective of the officer corps. When the counter-narratives of Antalas and John Troglita later in Book IV respond to this, they also highlight the constructed nature of Liberatus' analepsis.

The analepsis stretches from III.52 to IV.246: that is 654 lines or around 12 per cent of the total length of the poem. This is the second-longest digression of its kind in the extant corpus of Latin historical epic; only Aeneas' account of the fall of Troy in *Aeneid* II–III was longer, and this was Corippus' direct inspiration.<sup>27</sup> Like that passage, the digression considers the progressive stages of a military disaster, presented in the voice of a first-hand witness. Like Aeneas, Liberatus is frequently a horrified (and lachrymose) bystander at the events he recounts, but he shifts into direct personal action in one particularly memorable scene of nocturnal action, fleeing Hadrumentum just as Aeneas fled from Troy.<sup>28</sup>

Liberatus' digression is not a systematic survey of the past, but rather a syncopated sequence of episodes interspersed with bridging sections.<sup>29</sup> The first of these is the journey of Antalas' father, Guenfan, to an oracle to learn what the future holds for his son. Liberatus describes the circumstances of this journey, the oracle, the prophecy itself – which anticipates the coming history of Africa from Antalas' childhood to the aftermath of John's campaigns – and how these predictions were received among the Moors.<sup>30</sup> This comprises a little under 100 lines and is followed by a short account of Antalas' youth and his journey into barbaric criminality.<sup>31</sup> The next section traces the collapse of the Vandal kingdom, the focus of which is a long and broadly conventional description of a battle between Antalas (who barely features) and a Vandal leader called Hildimer.<sup>32</sup> Liberatus then recalls the last days of the Vandal kingdom, the Byzantine invasion and the ensuing peace that came to the region.<sup>33</sup> This is the central section of the digression by line count, and is often regarded as a celebration of an imperial golden age in

<sup>27</sup> Virg. *Aen.* II.3–III.715. Corippus' debts here have been widely recognized and discussed. Compare Blänsdorf (1975), 535–6; Zarini (1996); and Dorfbauer (2007). On the Virgilian analepsis, see especially the classic study of Heinze (1993), 3–67.

<sup>28</sup> See below 105–109.

<sup>29</sup> Burck (1979), 386 notes possible debts to Claudian in this approach, but compare Hajdú (2001).

<sup>30</sup> *Ioh* III.66–155. <sup>31</sup> *Ioh* III.156–83. <sup>32</sup> *Ioh* III.184–261. <sup>33</sup> *Ioh* III.262–339.

Africa. To this end, it deploys many familiar rhetorical motifs, but as we shall see, these are more complex than they first appear. At little more than seventy lines, this is also one of the shorter set pieces in the digression. The following lines have been lost, but the text resumes with a startling account of the plague which hit North Africa in 543, the social collapse which followed and the subsequent attack of Antalas, which is presented as a further consequence of the plague.<sup>34</sup> Book III concludes with an account of the Battle of Cillium, at which the Byzantine general Solomon is killed following the betrayal of his officer Guntharith. Antalas and the rebel Stutias (Corippus' Latinization of the rebel called Stotzas by Procopius) end the book as the dominant powers in Africa.<sup>35</sup>

Book IV opens with a second narrative interjection by Liberatus and then turns to the most remarkable section of his digression – the narrator's account of the fall of Hadrumetum in 544 and his own part in it.<sup>36</sup> By this point of the analepsis, Antalas has been almost entirely supplanted as the principal antagonist by Stutias, and the Moorish leader is only named only once in the whole of Book IV. Liberatus' account then turns to the confusing political upheaval of 545, before the second major battle sequence of the digression in which he describes the battle between Stutias and John son of Sisiniolus, at which both leaders were killed.<sup>37</sup> This is a largely formulaic battle description and owes more to Corippus' poetic models than it does to the historical events on the battlefield near Thacia. The digression ends with a short account of Guntharith's revolt in late 545 or early 546 and its suppression by the Prefect Athanasius and Artabanus (who is left unnamed).<sup>38</sup> Liberatus then bursts into tears again.

This narrative would be almost impossible to follow for an audience which was not already familiar with the broad outline of events (which is one of the reasons a lot of this ground was covered in Chapter 2 of the current study). As was appropriate to an epic, Liberatus includes no dates in his account, and his relative chronology is often confusing. While some of his emphasis might be explained by his broader narrative goals, these are not developed consistently. The long account of the Moorish prophecy at the opening of the analepsis was probably an invention of the poet's, for example, but its function in establishing the importance of Antalas as an antagonist is undermined by that figure's increasingly peripheral role in the

<sup>34</sup> *Ioh* III.343–400.    <sup>35</sup> *Ioh* III.401–60.    <sup>36</sup> *Ioh* IV.1–7 (interjection); IV.8–81 (Hadrumetum).

<sup>37</sup> *Ioh* IV.82–102 (545); IV.103–211 (Battle).    <sup>38</sup> *Ioh* IV.2012–2246.

account that follows.<sup>39</sup> By Book IV, Stutias has instead become the principal agent of Africa's ills, but he is introduced only briefly and the nature of his revolt is never clearly explained. Meanwhile, relatively minor events are given great prominence; the Vandal defeat under 'Hildimer' is not attested in our other sources, for example, and may be another invention of the poet's. Similarly, the treatment of Hadrumetum differs in its emphasis from Procopius' account of the same events. If Liberatus genuinely intended his account to explain the origins of the African troubles to a group of Byzantine officers unfamiliar with this world, his digression could only have been a baffling failure. But as a recalibration of this history for an audience already familiar with it, the analepsis plays a very different role. Read in these terms, the narrative makes important points about the African view of the recent past. This is particularly true of the bridging sections in III.262–339 (the Vandal collapse, the imperial intervention and the golden age), IV.82–102 (the political events of 545) and IV.219–46 (on the coup under Guntharith). These are worthy of closer examination.

#### *A Golden Age? (Iohannis III.262–339)*

The feature of Liberatus' digression most discussed in the scholarship is his apparent lamentation for a lost golden age within imperial North Africa.<sup>40</sup> This point is articulated clearly in the celebration of the imperial province at III.286–339, towards the middle of the long digression. The full rhetorical powers of the poet (or his spokesman) are brought to bear in something akin to a *laus Africae*:

Everything was prosperous, and there was a secure peace through the whole of Libya. In those days Ceres was fruitful, the vine blessed with grapes, and the colourful tree sparkled with jewelled olives. The farmer had begun to plant his new crops everywhere, led out his yoked oxen and rejoicing ploughed his fields as he sang a peaceful song from the hillside. And the happy traveller dared to sing to the moon.<sup>41</sup>

Here, Corippus has Liberatus deploy the arsenal of georgic imagery in support of Justinianic peace. Read alongside the imperial rhetoric of the

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 6 on the historical background of this episode.

<sup>40</sup> Compare for example Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 250; Zarini (2003), 43–4; Tommasi (2013), 280–1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ioh* III.323–30: *omnia plena bonis: Libyae pax tuta per orbem. | tunc fecunda Ceres, tunc laetus pampinus uuis, | pictaque gemmiferis arbor splendebat oliuis. | cultor in omni parte suas plantare nouellas | coeperat, et ductos iungens ad arata iuuenos | arua serebat ouans, placidusque a monte canebat. | ausus et ad lunam laetus cantare uiator.* I follow the line ordering of Diggle and Goodyear here. Compare Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 57, and commentary.

530s, the political message is clear enough. As we saw in Chapter 2, this period witnessed the imposition of imperial rule in North Africa; themes of victory echoed across the Mediterranean empire with the full-throated support of North African voices, especially in the early years. Liberatus' celebration also picks up on the language used by John Troglita earlier in Book III. There, the general's memories of an idealized land intensify his confusion at the present state of Africa:

When I left, Libya was fruitful and cultivated; on my parting it remained in the condition proper to it; if not even better, for I recall: fertile, overflowing in crops, producing in its fullness the fruit of the light-giving olive, and the swelling juice of happy Bacchus. A profound peace was in that place. What is that great madness of war? What mad fury set these unhappy fields ablaze?<sup>42</sup>

Liberatus develops this connection between John's personal oversight and the former fertility of Africa. Rather than relate Belisarius' conquest in detail, for example, the narrator simply addresses his general directly:

Your hand snatched the wretched Africans from the jaws of death, and removed the cruel yoke from them. Africa arose again, uplifted by your triumphs.<sup>43</sup>

Here, John rather than Belisarius is presented as the principal author of the Byzantine restoration, but this can be explained in a number of ways. Earlier passages in the *Iohannis* had already outlined the invasion in more traditional terms, and the poet may have been wary of repeating himself.<sup>44</sup> The dramatic context may also have been important: John was among Liberatus' immediate audience, of course, and recasting the invasion in a way that flattered him thus makes clear narrative sense, especially when presented in the voice of a junior officer. Liberatus' specific reference to 'your triumphs' and the depiction of John as a benevolent *pater* in protecting the early occupation presents more difficulties, but may be appropriating the political rhetoric in circulation at the time, where a comparable oversight was attributed to Justinian.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the dramatic considerations, it is noteworthy that the conquest of 533/4 is passed over very quickly in Liberatus' survey of the African past. The inflection points of his narrative are very different from

<sup>42</sup> *Ioh* III.29–34: *plenam Libyam cultamque reliqui, | inque statu proprio me discedente remansit | et melior (sum namque memor): fecunda, redundans | frugibus et fructus lumen fundentis oliuae | et latices laeti turgens referebat lacchi. | pax erat alta locis. quae tanta insania belli? | quis furor exarsit miseris insanus in aruis?*

<sup>43</sup> *Ioh* III.281–3: *uestra manus miseris mortis de faucibus Afros | eripuit fessisque iugum crudele retraxit. | Africa surrexit uestris erecta triumphis.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ioh* I.366–400; III.13–20. <sup>45</sup> *Ioh* III.293–4.

those of contemporary imperial accounts. Liberatus is entirely silent on the spectacular successes over the Vandals at Ad Decimum or Tricamarum, which Procopius describes in such detail, and had been widely celebrated in Constantinople.<sup>46</sup> Instead, he dwells on Antalas' defeat of Hildimer in 530 (96 lines), an episode which is not directly attested elsewhere. He places similar emphasis on the plague (40 lines) and on the mutually assured destruction of Stutias and John son of Sisiniolus at Thacia (116 lines). Liberatus makes no reference to the religious implications of the reconquest, despite the victory over the Vandals playing such a prominent role in the imperial ideology of the period. The Africans in his account welcome the peace conquest brings, and particularly John's role within it, but seem indifferent to their reintegration into the imperial world, another important theme of Justinian's triumphalism. These nuances can be explained away easily enough, of course, by the narrator's desire to flatter his audience, the poet's concern to skirt past certain controversial issues, or the simple fact that perspectives on events such as these could have changed greatly over the fifteen or twenty years since the invasion. But they are also a reminder that the poet (and his secondary narrator) shaped their accounts of the imperial occupation in response to a number of different factors, and did not thoughtlessly replicate imperial 'propaganda'.<sup>47</sup>

Two factors complicate this further. The first is the latent threat behind much of Liberatus' ostensible celebration of the imperial peace, which takes some of the shine off this 'golden' age. The narrator states proudly that Africa was at peace for ten years, a decade which corresponds to the period between the conquest in 533–4 and the plague (and the start of Antalas' attacks) in 543–4. This is where the digression is at its most rhapsodic, and is often taken as reflective of the principal political message of Liberatus' speech, but even here its optimism is tempered:

Flourishing and feeling joy, our land knew prosperity for ten whole years, and, although rebels were set against it by fate, the enemy fell before he could carry off his prey. Africa did not [mindlessly agree] to war while you were vigilant, [F]ather.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 90–5, makes several important observations on difficulties of equating 'panegyric' and 'propaganda' (though he still regards the *Iohannis* as more panegyric than is argued here).

<sup>48</sup> *Ioh* III.289–94: *florens haec gaudia sensit | nostra decem tellus plenos laxata per annos, | et, quamuis fuerint fato pellente rebelles, | ante magis cecidit quam praedam tolleret hostis. | non fmentis consensit tunc Africa bellum | te vigilante, pater.*



This was a peace founded on imperial vigilance, but one still punctuated by rebellions and wars. Liberatus goes on to describe the blood-soaked and bone-studded fields of Africa, which testify to imperial power:

Its fields were thickened with blood, whitened with bones; the plough strikes heads torn from their shoulders, and trunks are scattered over the grass by your sword.<sup>49</sup>

Although still ostensibly recalling the ‘ten years of peace’, Liberatus goes on to describe the victories of Solomon against Iaudas (presumably the campaigns of 535), and the revival of civil war under Stutias ‘one of your own men’, which we can date to 536:

This was heaped upon our loyal command, this anger, this unspeakable anxiety: civil war came back again. Then Carthage, with treaty broken, was shaken by savage raids, and faced hideous danger in an unequal war.<sup>50</sup>

This is hardly a bucolic picture of a tranquil Africa, and the latent spectre of violence is never far away. The opening of this celebration seems two-edged to say the least: ‘neither war, nor rapacious brigand, nor greedy soldier threatened our rustic homes’.<sup>51</sup> If Africa enjoyed ten years of peace, Liberatus reminds his audience, these were punctuated by war and bloodshed. He hints that the greedy plunderers and avaricious soldiers were never too far away.

Liberatus’ image of the early Byzantine occupation is complicated still further by the warm terms in which he describes the later Vandal period before Antalas’ defeat of Hildimer. His tone here is similar, but if anything bathed in a still warmer prelapsarian glow:

In earlier times a peace was secure through all of the lands of Libya. Wretched Africa rejoiced in new crowns. Farmers bound their haystacks with golden grain, Bacchus reddened as ever on the young vine, and shining peace ornamented her happy land with olive trees.<sup>52</sup>

This perspective upon the later Vandal period has important implications for the account of the Byzantine golden age which follows. Liberatus’

<sup>49</sup> *Ioh* III.295–9: *pinguescunt sanguine campi, | ossibus albescunt, feriuntur uomere rapta | ex umeris capita et sparsi per gramina trunci | ense tuo.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ioh* III.306–9: *haec nobis, haec ira fuit, haec addita rebus | cura nefanda piis: bellum ciuile reuixit. | tunc Carthago feras dirupto foedere praedas | sensit et infandum non aequo Marte periculum.* Here I follow Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 56, reading *nobis* at v.306 for *rabies*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ioh* III.321–2: *non bellum, non praedo rapax, non miles auarus | rustica tecta subit.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ioh* III.67–72: *nam tempore prisco | pax erat in cunctis Libyae tutissima terris. | gaudebat miseranda nouis ornata coronis | Africa. nectebant flauis gestamen aristis | agricolae, solitoque rubens in palmitibus Bacchus | Paxque sua laetam fulgens ornabat oliua.*

lamentation is not simply for the ending of ten years of imperial peace, but also for the twenty or thirty years before it. This had been a common theme for poets in the Vandal period, and the *Latin Anthology* includes several celebrations of African fertility and happiness under the Hasding monarchs.<sup>53</sup> But in Corippus' account, Antalas disrupted this idyll:

The fierce brigand raged: nowhere was life safe. We were oppressed, at the mercy of unjust fates. And as the Vandal kingdom perished, so too did our own happiness.<sup>54</sup>

The Vandal kingdom is remembered fondly here, and this may well have reflected the mixed feelings of the poet and his African audience about the recent past. Corippus' epic was emphatically not the grand imperial narrative in which a crusading emperor rescued an imperilled populace from barbarian heresy, but offers a more tangled local nostalgia. Liberatus' account of the defeat of the Vandal Hildimer by Antalas' insurgent Moors is a heavily stylized battle narrative which owes more to the poet's imagination than to any authentic historical record.<sup>55</sup> There is also some suspicion that he deliberately garbled some of his historical details. Hildimer is the only Vandal named in the digression: not only is he otherwise unattested, but his name conflates those of the last two Vandal kings, Hilderic and Gelimer, and aspects of his story correspond to each of them. Liberatus may have deliberately jumbled his narrative here, or even have been making a sly joke about the apparent interchangeability of Vandalic names.<sup>56</sup> In purely dramatic terms, however, Hildimer's role is clear enough. He stands as a sympathetic if somewhat ineffectual character whose defeat led to the collapse of African prosperity, which was then only temporarily restored with the imperial occupation. As Peter Riedlberger has noted, if this digression reflected contemporary political understandings in the early 550s, one message we must draw from it is that the later Vandal kingdom was remembered much more positively than often assumed.<sup>57</sup>

### *Trials and Tribulations*

The primary function of Liberatus' analepsis was to explain the disasters which extinguished these ephemeral moments of peace, but this is also less

<sup>53</sup> Clover (1986); Miles (2005).

<sup>54</sup> *Ioh* III.193–6: *feruet praedo ferox: nullis iam uita salutis | certa locis. acti fatis urgemur iniquis. | tempore Vandalici perierunt gaudia regni | nostra simul.*

<sup>55</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 188. <sup>56</sup> Ehlers (1980), 134; Merrills (2016b), 31–2.

<sup>57</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 94; compare Cesa (1985), 87, and Zarini and Delattre (2015).

straightforward than frequently assumed. The principal agent of this destruction was certainly the Moorish prince Antalas, and he occupies a focal role in the opening part of the digression. Liberatus' narrative opens with his birth and the prophetic account of the disasters that will accompany his life. Antalas is presented as central to the collapse of the Vandal kingdom, but he becomes increasingly peripheral in the remainder of the digression. This may be explained in part by his personal support of the imperial occupation during the ten years of 'peace', as we saw in Chapter 2, but he is also displaced from the narrative by a range of new threats. Antalas' role in the subsequent unrest is at first complemented and then more or less supplanted by the mutineer Stutias (Stotzas), whose conflict with the empire dominates the latter part of the digression. This culminates in a long examination of divisions within the administration, and finally in an account of the revolt of Guntharith and its suppression. Antalas has no role in any of this and barely appears in the second part of the analepsis. While many commentators have confidently asserted that Liberatus' digression places all of Africa's ills at Antalas' door while framing the Byzantine administration in wholly positive terms, this is scarcely substantiated by a close reading.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, themes of civil war and internecine conflict in the style of Lucan are much more prominent than panegyric celebration throughout the analepsis.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, the poet clearly manipulated his historical survey with an eye to later events; the statement that Cusina was among Solomon's allies at Cillium in 544, for example, finds no corroboration in Procopius and, from what is known of that Moorish leader, was probably a fabrication.<sup>60</sup> But since he became an important ally of John Troglita's in 548 and was supposedly among Liberatus' audience in 546, the retrojection of his loyalty is readily explained. Despite these moments, however, the political assumptions of the digression are frequently difficult to pin down. The possibility that it

<sup>58</sup> Thus Cameron (1982), 40: 'No blame is attached to Byzantine policy of course, and the mismanagement of the army is totally ignored'; and Cameron (1985), 178: '[Procopius and Corippus] do their best to pass over the more deep-seated problem and suggest that all was well in the best possible world.' This conflates the positive framing of the period 546–8 with Corippus' frostier account of the earlier period. Tommasi Moreschini (2017), 208, n. 20, notes that this interpretation is widespread. Compare also Zarini (2003), 9, n. 41. This was not always the case. Compare Partsch (1875), 292: 'Mutinies in the Byzantine army, failures and defeats are reported with the same accuracy as the most brilliant deeds' (*Meutereien im byzantinischen Heere, Misserfolge und Niederlagen werden mit derselben Genauigkeit berichtet wie die glänzendsten Taten*).

<sup>59</sup> On the Lucanian civil war motif, see especially Ehlers (1980), 135–6; Nesselrath (1992), 143; Zarini (2003), 15; Goldlust (2017), 55.

<sup>60</sup> *Ioh* III.404–11. On Corippus' probable fiction here, compare: Modéran (1986), 202; Gärtner (2008), 80.

may in fact have been deliberately ambiguous in its anatomy of Africa's ills is worth considering in more detail.

Liberatus' rather elusive diagnosis of Africa's troubles is clearly illustrated by the shifting associations of one particular image, introduced in the opening couplet of the digression:

In the beginning, Africa had suffered twinned plagues; now wretched once again, it suffers twinned ruin.<sup>61</sup>

These *geminas pestes* ('twinned plagues') and *geminas ruinas* ('twinned ruins') evoke the *geminæ pestes cognominæ Diræ* ('twinned plagues known as the Furies') of *Aeneid* XII.845.<sup>62</sup> The geographical setting also enables a connection to the *geminos . . . Scipiadas* ('twinned Scipios') who are presented as *cladem Libyaë* ('the ruin of Libya') in *Aeneid* VI.842–4; both references may well have been recognized by Corippus' audience.<sup>63</sup> His historical referents are less clear, however. It is not immediately apparent whether the 'twinned plagues' and the 'twinned ruin' that appear here refer to the same threats. From the historical context, the former could most naturally be identified with Antalas' Moorish revolt on the one hand, and the oppression of the Vandal kingdom on the other. This interpretation is supported by a reprise of the same image immediately after the account of Gelimer's coup:

At that time, Africa was caught between twinned plagues: on one side a brutal war oppresses it, on the other a plundering tyrant.<sup>64</sup>

In this case, the *geminas pestes* seem clear enough, but the formulation retains an element of ambiguity. The seething war (*feruens bellum*) is presumably meant to refer to Antalas' uprising, and the *tyrannus* to Gelimer, but these roles could equally be reversed: Antalas is identified as a tyrant throughout the *Iohannis*, which in turn would cast Gelimer's oppression of the Vandals and Africans as a war. The power of the image is only magnified by this uncertainty. The personified Africa stands between the perils which are exactly equivalent in their threat; differentiating between them matters less than the precarious state of the province.

<sup>61</sup> *Ioh* III.63–4: *principio geminas iam senserat Africa pestes: | nunc iterum geminas sentit miseranda ruinas.*

<sup>62</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 119–20; *Virg. Aen.* XII.845 *geminæ pestes cognominæ Diræ.*

<sup>63</sup> *Virg. Aen.* VI.842–4. I am grateful to Aaron Peltari for this observation. A further point of reference may have been Claud. *Eutr.* II.540, where the twinned threats facing the empire are presented as the fault of the malign Rufinus. On this compare Goldlust (2017), 214.

<sup>64</sup> *Ioh* III.269–70: *namque inter geminas pressa est tunc Africa pestes: | hinc feruens bellum, spolians premit inde tyrannus.*

At the time of Liberatus' digression, however, the Vandal kingdom was a distant memory and new threats had emerged. This is hinted at in the narrator's reference to Antalas and Stutias as *gemini tyranni* ('twinned tyrants') at the start of Book IV, where the latter effectively displaces Gelimer from his position as half of the problem.<sup>65</sup> But the more telling use of the same motif comes later in the same book, when Liberatus laments the dysfunctional operation of the Byzantine military system:

The government was divided into twinned parts: and each had its own leader. While one, in his pride, thought that he was the foremost, the other refused to be second. And Africa wept, stripped bare by barbarian plundering.<sup>66</sup>

Here, Liberatus speaks of twinned 'parts' (*geminas partes*) rather than twinned 'plagues', but the repetition of the opening image is clear.<sup>67</sup> Again, a personified Africa is caught between a pair of threats, and the barbarian menace magnifies this danger. At this point in his narrative, Liberatus is describing the chaotic events of 545; he could be alluding to the rivalry between Sergius and John son of Sisiniolus, or that between Sergius and Areobindus, or perhaps even to another internecine squabble, but the reference is clearly to internal conflict. This is confirmed by his allusion in the preceding lines to the most famous twins in Roman history and the fratricidal conflict which marked Rome's foundation:

When the world was still untouched, and producing only meagre crops, it could not support two leaders, and nor could Rome, the greatest of realms, which consecrated its first walls with its own blood.<sup>68</sup>

The uncomfortable implication here is not simply that the 'twinned threats' of the recent past were the creation of internal tensions within the imperial system, but perhaps also that these problems go all the way back to the very foundation of the Roman state.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Ioh.* IV.47.

<sup>66</sup> *Ioh.* IV.99–102: *diuiditur geminas inter res publica partes: | quisque suos tenere duces. dumque ille superbus | se primum esse putat, non se tamen ille secundum, | Africa barbaricis planxit nudata rapinis.* And compare Lucan, *BC*. I.125–6. I am grateful to one of my anonymous readers for identifying this intertext.

<sup>67</sup> Note also the reprise of the same image at *Ioh.* V.253–6 on Antalas slicing the lungs of Arsacis into twinned parts (*geminas partes*). On this motif in Corippus' fighting sequences (which was original to him), see Caramico (2015), 148–9 and Chapter 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ioh.* IV.94–6: *mundus adhuc rudis et paruis uix laetus aristis | non potuit portare duos, non maxima rerum | Roma, nouos proprio quae sanxit sanguine muros.*

<sup>69</sup> This was not, of course, original to Corippus. See Wiseman (1995) on the shifting sands of this tradition in earlier Roman writing.

The ostensible purpose of the *Iohannis* was to celebrate imperial success, and clearly Liberatus' analepsis was not intended to be read as an existential challenge to the *res publica*. Nevertheless, strong undercurrents of internecine conflict run through this part of the epic, particularly in Book IV, in the accounts of the loss of Hadrumetum and of Guntharith's coup. The rebellious army is variously termed 'Massylian' and 'Maurusian', and hence kitted out in barbarian clothing, but it is Stutias and not Antalas who plays the starring role in the events of 544 and 545.<sup>70</sup> Themes of civil war permeate the whole of this section, not least in the description of the rebel leader's encounter with John son of Sisiniolus:

Suddenly the dreadful Stutias set in motion the enemy standards, and rushed out from the middle of the valley; Hermogenes – a disgrace to the Latin name – and Taurus went with him. A Roman troop – not our own – followed these rebels. Then once more the same wretched weapons clashed together in a civil war. Kindred breasts were attacked, and guts spilled by kindred hands.<sup>71</sup>

The same theme recurs in Liberatus' treatment of Stutias' dying speech, which forms an emotional climax of sorts to the digression. Here, the rebel regrets his rebellion against the state and compares himself to Catiline, the great conspirator against the republic. This was a civil war.<sup>72</sup>

The allusion to the *geminas pestes* in the opening line of Liberatus' digression would also have had a more literal resonance. Indeed, for an African audience of the early 550s, any reference to 'plague' would surely evoked memories of the bubonic disease which struck the Mediterranean world from 542 onwards and caused widespread devastation.<sup>73</sup> Liberatus dwells at some length on the plague and the social upheaval which came in its wake, and indeed the *Iohannis* provides our only direct evidence that the disease struck North Africa at this time.<sup>74</sup> But a noteworthy feature of his account is its rather impressionistic nature. Earlier poetic treatments of plague from Lucretius onwards often described its pathology in depth,

<sup>70</sup> The significance of these terms is explored in Chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ioh* IV.161–7: *cum subito Stutias mediis e uallibus atrox | signa mouens inimica ruit, crimenque Latini | nominis Hermogenes pariter Taurusque feruntur. | hos sequitur Romana manus, non nostra, rebelles. | tunc iterum miseris pariter concurrere telis | et bellum ciuile datum est. cognata petuntur | pectora, cognatis funduntur uiscera dextris.*

<sup>72</sup> Goldlust (2017), 156.

<sup>73</sup> The recent scholarship is voluminous. See Mordechai and Eisenberg (2019) and Sessa (2019) for critical surveys.

<sup>74</sup> Zach *Rhet.* X.9a includes Africa among the regions hit by the plague; Proc. *BPII*.22.8–9 implies that the plague was universal; so too does Vict. Tun. a.543 (who was himself African and probably in the region at the time).

lingering on the precise physical sufferings of its victims.<sup>75</sup> Contemporary prose descriptions also emphasized the particulars of the disease in horrified detail: Procopius' report of the plague in Constantinople, which drew heavily on Thucydides' famous account of the Athenian plague, is an especially vivid example.<sup>76</sup> Corippus would certainly have been aware of these conventions, but he did not follow them. Instead, Liberatus' tone is apocalyptic but not specific:

That fatal year mingled heaven and hell, confounding the wretched with portents. Men saw themselves to be drained by wounds from divine arrows, then saw various plagues and cruel visions erupt from the depths of the earth. There was no terror now of bitter death.<sup>77</sup>

He goes on to emphasize the religious shortcomings of the African populace and the social upheaval which followed the plague:

All law courts were thrown open, and painful disputes came forward. Discord raged throughout the world, stirring up savage quarrels. Piety withdrew completely. No-one was compelled by his conscience to pursue justice.<sup>78</sup>

*Discordia* was closely associated in the Latin poetic tradition with civil war, and the theme of a society turned in on itself is apparent here.<sup>79</sup> The influence of earlier poets who had similarly reflected on the disruption to society that plague might cause can be traced in Corippus' writing, but his emphasis is original.<sup>80</sup> Liberatus explains that Antalas took this opportunity to attack the African cities because they had been weakened by the plague. Antalas' aggression is explained in part by his wrath at the murder of his brother and in part by simple opportunism, but ultimately he is presented as an agent of divine will.<sup>81</sup> It was God's wrath – and not that of the Moorish leader – which led Africa to disaster.

Corippus is a less helpful historical source on the pandemic of 543 than we might wish and his observations have rarely been discussed in depth

<sup>75</sup> Lucr. *De Rer. Nat.* VI.1138–1286. And compare Ramirez de Verger (1985–2000) and Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 255 on the later poetic tradition (and Corippus' inheritance of it).

<sup>76</sup> Proc. *BP* II.22–3; Thuc. II.47–54.

<sup>77</sup> *Ioh* III.347–52: *nam miseros monstros conturbans letifer annus | miscuerat superis manes, seseque uidebant | uulnera diuinis homines hausisse sagittis, | tum uarias pestes ima consurgere terra | aspectusque feros. iam nullus terror acerbis | mortibus.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ioh* III.376–9: *hinc fora cuncta patent, et tristes surgere lites | incipiunt. saeuit toto discordia mundo | iurgia saeua mouens. pietas omnino recessit. | iustitiam nullus compuncta mente secutus.*

<sup>79</sup> Hardie (2019), 103–45, discusses *discordia* as a motif of cosmic instability in Christian Latin poetry.

<sup>80</sup> See Ramirez de Verger (1985–2000) on the plague passage, and especially biblical echoes within it.

<sup>81</sup> *Ioh* III.384–92.

even in the latest wave of scholarship on the Justinianic Plague. He includes no precise details on the nature of the plague or of its demographic impact. While he states that the disease struck the provincial population much harder than it did Antalas and those living in the countryside, it is possible that this is just a literary conceit and there is some (slight) evidence that the plague was also felt deep in the heart of Byzacium.<sup>82</sup> But Corippus' deviation from poetic precedent was not accidental. In eschewing poetic commonplaces in his description of this event – and hence running against his literary instincts to draw on this tradition wherever possible – the poet placed greater emphasis on what mattered. His interest in the social consequences of the plague rather than the details of its pathology – spelled out in rapacious lawsuits and collective godlessness rather than boils and buboes – reads less like a poetic commonplace than a reflection on the genuine social memory of a population only half a decade after the events described. Hideous as the initial impact of such a disease may be, it is often the events that follow that create the greater social trauma and leave a deeper mark in the collective imagination.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Liberatus on Hadrumetum*

The story of the betrayal, loss and recapture of Hadrumetum in late 544 is a moment of particular drama within Liberatus' digression. Politically, Hadrumetum was the most important city in Byzacium, and its capitulation to the combined forces of Stotzas and Antalas was a shock to the imperial administration, as we saw in Chapter 2. Liberatus' account of this episode is one of the few passages where his narrative of the *Iohannis* can be directly compared to that in the *Wars* of Procopius, and has been extensively studied as a result.<sup>84</sup> In outline, the two accounts of events at Hadrumetum are generally complementary. Both describe the *Dux* Himerius and the garrison being called out of the city, where they encountered a numerically superior force of rebels and Moors. A small group of loyal cavalry then fled to a small hill, but were ultimately forced to surrender and join the rebellion. Shortly after this, Hadrumetum fell and it was only the escape and return of a small handful of loyalists which brought it back into imperial hands. Both narratives emphasize the role of

<sup>82</sup> Durliat (1989), 108, argues that four epitaphs of youths dated to early 543 in Sufetula may be evidence for the plague there, but the inscriptions do not refer to the cause of death.

<sup>83</sup> Compare Walde (2011) on manifestations of collective trauma in epic literature.

<sup>84</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.1–26. See for example Ehlers (1980), 124–32; Tandoi (1980), 73–9; Modéran (1986); Gärtner (2008), 97–114.



trickery and subterfuge in the loss of Hadrumetum, but disagree over the form this took: Corippus states that the initial instruction to the garrison was a forged letter which purported to be from the *Dux* John son of Sisiniolus, but which actually came from Antalas. Procopius indicates that this first letter was a simple miscommunication and that it was Himerius who persuaded the defenders of the city to open their gates once he had been captured in the field and forced to join the rebellion.<sup>85</sup>

The most important aspect of Liberatus' account lies in the drama of its delivery, rather than in its specific details. Here, the narrator assumes a focal role for the first time. This is anticipated in the direct interjection in the opening lines of Book IV, where the basic principles of the digression are reiterated, and with them the emotional implication of what follows:

[W]hen I recall the name of the infamous tyrant, you can see the greater sadness surging from my innermost marrow, shaking my bones. My scrambled thoughts slow my recollection of the leaders defeated, of my own misfortunes and those of my men. That treacherous soldier forced the trembling men to hand over their standards to the villains. It would take a long time to relate this disaster: but let me remember the main crimes of those wars in detailed words.<sup>86</sup>

This personal experience is communicated most intensely in the account of Hadrumetum which follows. Elsewhere in the digression, Liberatus generally expresses himself through an impersonal voice which is similar to that of the primary narrative of the *Iohannis*, but here a sudden move to the first person underscores his personal involvement in events.<sup>87</sup> This marks a shift from a homodiegetic narrative (where the narrator participates in the events described) to an autodiegetic account (where his agency is crucial to their outcome). Liberatus confesses that he was among the troops who left Hadrumetum, were forced to surrender at Cepar and returned to aid the rebels in their capture of the city. He also acts as one of the leading figures in the escape from Hadrumetum, along with another tribune called Marturius, who was certainly among the audience of his

<sup>85</sup> *Ioh* IV.11–18; compare Proc. *BV* II.23.4–5, 13–15.

<sup>86</sup> *Ioh* IV.1–7: *infandi nomen memorare tyranni | surgit ab internis conturbans ossa medullis | durior ecce dolor. confusa mente retardor | tot clades memorare ducum casusque meorum | atque meos. miles trepidos non fidus adegit | tradere signa malis. longum est narrare ruinam: | sed memorem certis bellorum crimina uerbis.* On the textual problems with this passage (which are considerable), see Tandoi (1980), 73–5, and Goldlust (2017), 110–11.

<sup>87</sup> Gärtner (2008), 97, notes the use of the first person elsewhere in the digression simply to emphasize Liberatus' own origins ('we Africans'). Only here is his account autodiegetic.

digression.<sup>88</sup> Uniquely within the analepsis, this was an episode presented through the eyes of an individual who was there.

The clear literary inspiration for all this was the similar narrative in *Aeneid* II, where Aeneas describes his own participation in the fall of Troy, first as a horrified onlooker and then as the protagonist of his own daring escape. Corippus goes to some lengths to ensure that his audience notices these parallels.<sup>89</sup> The messenger whose false message draws the garrison of Hadrumetum away from the city is twice named as Sinon – the treacherous Greek infiltrator who persuaded the Trojans to bring the infamous horse into their city.<sup>90</sup> Corippus' bizarre statement that the defenders at Cepar failed to close the gates of their fortress and hence were rapidly defeated may also have been intended as an allusion to the same event: certainly it is hard to explain the apparent blunder in any other way.<sup>91</sup> The structure of Liberatus' account also seems closely modelled on that of Aeneas, particularly when he is finally stirred into action:

Afterwards, I was able to change the minds of some of my comrades with my words, and Marturius was also sensible in his advice: we encouraged the wavering spirits to rally to their proper standards. The soldiers agreed to flee in groups from the evil camp. The welcome darkness of the night rescued me, frightened, along with the crowd. When I arrived home, I saw my house and my wife.<sup>92</sup>

The nocturnal setting, Liberatus' shift from passive contemplation to action and his return home to see his wife are all details which have no parallel in Procopius' account but which have direct (and obvious) antecedents in Aeneas' narrative of the last hours of Troy.<sup>93</sup> Here, therefore, Corippus clearly modelled his account on a direct literary model, but Procopius may well have done something similar. The historian describes the heroic escape

<sup>88</sup> *Ioh* IV.66–74. Marturius is named among John's officers at Antonia Castra in *Ioh* IV.201 and IV.503. *PLRE* III Marturius.

<sup>89</sup> Blänsdorf (1975), 545–6; Tandoi (1980), 75–6; Gärtner (2008), 98–102. There are also parallels to the Hypsipylus narrative of Statius *Thebaid* V, which was inspired by the same passage of Virgil.

<sup>90</sup> *Ioh* IV.13, 23; Virg. *Aen.* II.79–80. Ehlers (1980), 124–5; Tommasi Moeschini (2001b), 265–7; Gärtner (2008), 97; Goldlust (2017), 114–16.

<sup>91</sup> *Ioh* IV.40–1; Gärtner (2008), 106; Goldlust (2017), 124.

<sup>92</sup> *Ioh* IV.65–72: *sociorum flectere mentes | post licuit per uerba mihi. Marturius una | consilio maturus erat. compellimus ambo | nutantes animos propriis se reddere signis. | assensere uiri castris fensere† malignis. | paulatim temptare fugam. me noctis amicae | eripiunt trepidum turba comitante tenebrae, | perueniensque meas uidi cum coniuge sedes.*

<sup>93</sup> Ehlers (1980), 124–5; Gärtner (2008), 101–3. On Virgil's *Iliupersis* and its own literary debts, see especially Heinze (1993), 3–67. Rossi (2004), 17–53, explores the topos of the *urbs capta* as an influence on Aeneas' account. Nevertheless, it is clear that Virgil's poem was the principal point of reference for Corippus.

of a priest called Paul, who is lowered down the city walls to escape a hostile tyrant and flees to a nearby capital.<sup>94</sup> This story may have been in circulation at the time, but contemporaries would surely have recognized its parallels with the flight of Paul (Saul) from Damascus recorded in Acts (reprinted in 2 Corinthians).<sup>95</sup> Corippus' silence about this episode may reflect his desire to emphasize the Virgilian parallels over the scriptural, and need not have been an ideologically motivated silence about the prominent role of a churchman in these events, as some have argued.<sup>96</sup>

More significantly, the status of Liberatus as a fully autodiegetic narrator also allows Corippus to confront the anguish of the recent past directly and to explore the implications of this terrible moment. This is clearest in Liberatus' account of the aftermath of the surrender at Cebar, where the tribune had been among the Roman troops who turned (however briefly) to revolt:

[Stutias] warned of war and at the same time urged and exhorted the men to fight by various means, sometimes threatening, sometimes flattering. Overcome by fear, the men threw down their spears, swiftly flung themselves at the tyrant's knees and hailed him with friendly words. There was no salvation from their officers. Why report all the details? We asked for mercy; it was given at once. We asked the enemy to swear on their lives; they did so. Compelled, we pretended that we would follow the infamous tyrants. Thus, the city of Justinian was handed over to the savage Moors, and left to an uncertain fate.<sup>97</sup>

This account sacrifices historical precision for effect (and affect) by conflating the surrender of the cavalry detachment at Cebar with the fall of the city of Hadrumetum, which happened shortly afterwards. Liberatus' third-person account of the terrified surrender of the soldiers is lent extraordinary power by the sudden switch to the first-person plural: *we* asked for pardon, *we* promised to serve the tyrants.

It is important to reiterate that Corippus is undertaking a work of ventriloquism here. This is not a first-hand account of one of the most troubling events of late 544 in the poet's own words, but an imaginative reconstruction of this episode from the perspective of a character.

<sup>94</sup> Proc. *BV* II.23.18–26.    <sup>95</sup> Acts 9:25; 2 Corinthians 11:33.

<sup>96</sup> On religious themes within the *Iohannis*, see Chapter 6. On the argument that Corippus consciously omits the Pauline story (which must have been widely known), see Goldlust (2017), 131.

<sup>97</sup> *Ioh* IV.55–65: *at bella simul promittit et urget | hortaturque uiros uariis ad bella figuris. | nunc minitans, nunc blandus adest. terrore subacti | proiciunt sua tela uiri, genibusque tyranni | accurrunt celeres et amica uoce salutant. | in ducibus iam nulla salus. quid cuncta referre? | oramus ueniam: datur ilicet. egimus hostes | per uitam iurare suam: fecere. coacti | finximus infandis ueluti seruire tyrannis. | Iustiniana polis saeuis tunc tradita Mauris | sorte sub ancipiti.*

If Liberatus was a historical figure (and there is every reason to assume that he was), he would have been among the primary audience of the *Iohannis* in the early 550s, and many individuals who had gone through similar experiences would presumably have stood alongside him. While the poet's motivation in shifting his narrative register here was doubtless partly intended to accentuate the Virgilian resonances of his own epic and hence to flatter the sensibilities of some sections of his audience, this was more than mere literary game playing. Corippus' Liberatus undertakes the unthinkable (if reluctant) betrayal of his emperor and turns against his comrades, even if this treachery is mitigated by his subsequent heroism. He personally experiences the lurch of his society towards civil conflict and the anguish which comes with it. In emphasizing a small-scale action on the slopes of Cebur rather than the fall of Hadrumetum, Corippus was not seeking to deflect from the greater catastrophe (which would in any case have been remembered by all of his audience), but rather to explore the implications of the mutiny as experienced by those on the front lines.<sup>98</sup> There is certainly a Moorish presence within this passage – and, as Liberatus notes, Hadrumetum is ultimately surrendered to the 'Moors' – but civil war is the greater threat, not least for what it did to those Romans caught up in the conflict. The boundaries between friend and foe are never more blurred in the *Iohannis* than they are here. Scarcely less crucial, of course, is the function of Liberatus' later heroism in exorcising this moment of weakness and in reasserting the essential trustworthiness of the Roman armed forces.

None of this reflects particularly well on the imperial army of the 540s. Some studies have claimed that Liberatus sought to present the disaster in a way that exculpated the imperial army, but this argument seems unsustainable.<sup>99</sup> While Corippus may not have described the apparent treachery of Himerius in as much detail as Procopius, and perhaps places a greater emphasis on the proportion of Roman troops who remained loyal, his is hardly a whitewash of a troubling episode. Himerius is named as the individual responsible for the defence of Hadrumetum at the opening of this section of the digression, and few of Corippus' immediate audience could have forgotten the rumours that circulated about his role in this sorry surrender. Moreover, Corippus lends his account considerable impact by directly confronting the guilt and contrition of the soldiers on the ground, moreover, and doing so in their own troubled voices.

<sup>98</sup> Contra Ehlers (1980), 132–3; Gärtner (2008), 105–6.

<sup>99</sup> Thus: Modéran (1986), 207; Gärtner (2008), 112–13.

*Liberatus on Guntharith*

The final section of Liberatus' digression is concerned with the coup of Guntharith in the winter of 545/6. This was a short but brutal episode, as we saw in Chapter 3. Procopius tells us that Guntharith's regime lasted only thirty-six days, but the political aftershocks were still reverberating at the time of John's landing in the following summer. It was the messy aftermath of the rising and its suppression that had led to John's appointment at the head of a new expeditionary army, and the Moorish unrest in the hinterland was directly related to the actions of the usurper. Liberatus does not linger for long on the details of the coup, but Corippus does: the short account which closes the long analepsis is only the first of four reflections on Guntharith's usurpation within the epic, as we shall see. Of all the events of the recent past, this seems to be the one which concerned the poet the most.

Liberatus' account is relatively brief. Guntharith is introduced earlier in the digression when his cowardly flight from the field is used to explain Solomon's defeat and death during the battle of Cillium in 544.<sup>100</sup> No reference is made there to Guntharith's position as *Dux Numidiae*, and indeed his high office is passed over without comment in the account of the rising. Where Procopius delights in the intricate plots of Guntharith, Areobindus, Cusina (Koutsinas in his account) and Antalas, Liberatus simply presents the episode as a betrayal of trust:

Behold once more, Guntharith, with twisted intentions – that evil, deceitful, cursed, dreadful, tasteless adulterer, bandit, murderer, rapist and foulest agent of war – attacked our unsuspecting commander with his cruel arms, taking him captive with trickery and falsely swearing oaths. He was not moved by any reverence for the emperor, nor was he afraid to wage war or assume the name of tyrant.<sup>101</sup>

Liberatus' account is vague, but would presumably have been comprehensible enough to an audience who remembered these events for themselves. The accusation of murder doubtless alludes to the purges which followed the coup, while the reference to adultery must reflect Guntharith's attempted courtship of Areobindus' widow (and the emperor's niece) Praeicta, through whom he wished to legitimate his claim to authority.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *Ioh* III.428–9.

<sup>101</sup> *Ioh* IV.222–8: *Guntarith en iterum peruersa mente malignus, | perfidus, infelix, atrox, insulsus, adulter, | praedo, homicida, rapax, bellorum pessimus auctor, | ductorem incautum crudelibus occupat armis | oppressumque dolo rapuit iuransque fefellit. | principis haud illum tanti reuerentia mouit. | sumere nec timuit bellum nomenque tyranni.*

<sup>102</sup> See Chapter 2.

Liberatus includes much less detail than Procopius on the events of the thirty-six days. He says nothing on the likely complicity of parts of the military, civilian and religious establishment in the regime, and here we can probably assume that Corippus was silent out of tact. The sequence of plots which led to the downfall of the usurper is also simplified substantially in the poetic account. Whereas Procopius describes how Artabanes and a cabal of his compatriots murdered Guntharith at a banquet and so returned Carthage to the empire, Liberatus' account presents Athanasius as the mastermind of this plot:

They only lay under this heavy sword for a brief period: the days of this abominable and catastrophic reign were cut short. Through his peerless counsel, our good father Athanasius saved the Africans from the midst of the massacre committed by the deceiver. He alone was able to return Libya to Roman power and condemn the malicious tyrant to death. It was the Armenian who had been the agent of this important plan. Calm, with the gravity of his age, [Athanasius] forced him to kill the ruthless man. This elderly father was not afraid to risk danger in the name of freedom. The ill-fated Guntharith, who wished to maintain his cruel rule, felt the Armenian's sword at a cruel banquet and stained with his blood the table where he sat.<sup>103</sup>

This simplified narrative of Guntharith's downfall was obviously politically inspired. Athanasius remained Praetorian prefect at the dramatic moment of Liberatus' speech, and Corippus later celebrates his role in supporting the imperial field army in the winter of 547.<sup>104</sup> He may well have continued in post into the early 550s, and was probably among the primary audience of the *Iohannis*.<sup>105</sup> Artabanes, by contrast, had left Carthage in the spring or summer of 546, and had subsequently been caught up in his own plot against Justinian.<sup>106</sup> In downplaying the latter's role while emphasizing that of Athanasius, Liberatus' account was politically deft and may have helped with the collective rehabilitation of a prefect whose record through this affair had hardly been spotless. But this could

<sup>103</sup> *Iob* IV.230–42: *sub gladio iacuerunt graui, sed tempore paruo: | abbreviata dies infanda et pessima regni est. | nam pater ille bonus summis Athanasius Afros | consiliis media rapuit de caede maligni. | hic potuit Libyam Romanis reddere fastis | solus et infestum leto damnare tyrannum. | Armenius tanti fuerat tunc ille minister | consilii. hunc placidus cana grauitate coegit | immitem mactare uirum. temptare periculum | non timuit genitor pro libertate senilis. | Guntarith infelix, cupiens fera regna tenere, | Armenios enses saeua inter pocula sensit | et male concessas maculauit sanguine mensas.*

<sup>104</sup> *Iob* VII.199–208.

<sup>105</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 87. *PLRE* III Athanasius 1. He was replaced as prefect by Paulus before September 552 (Nov. App 6).

<sup>106</sup> *PLRE* III Artabanes 2.

not entirely rewrite the recent past.<sup>107</sup> The troops notionally assembled to hear Liberatus' account would have remembered many details well enough, as would the listeners gathered around Corippus five years later. Liberatus never claims that Athanasius had been able to solve Africa's ills through his actions, and the digression ends on a lachrymose note. Perhaps more important, Corippus does not allow his audience to assume that this is the definitive statement on the Guntharith rebellion.

### Antalas' View of Events

Two short passages also reveal very clearly that Liberatus' framing of the recent past was intended to be recognized as the constructed perspective of a specific character, and not as a statement of Corippus' own historical viewpoint. Antalas' analepsis is the first and perhaps the more surprising of these. As Book IV progresses and the Roman soldiers digest Liberatus' account, the envoy Amantius returns to camp with news from Antalas. Amantius had previously been sent to demand the Moors' surrender midway through Book II, where John promised widespread slaughter and the desecration of the local gods if he was met with anything less than complete surrender.<sup>108</sup> This certainly misrepresents the nature of his embassy, as we shall see in Chapter 5, but the tone of the exchange within the poem is belligerent and Antalas' response is predictable. First, Amantius describes his hostile reception in the Moorish camp in terms that evoke the infernal imagery of classical mythology; this passage is the closest approximation to the epic topos of the *katabasis* or journey to the underworld in the *Iohannis*:

The Moorish crowd came together in a swift race, and black faces filled his tent. It is said that Dis once held a council in this way when he was preparing to fight the gods, and that a thousand monsters came over the wide roads. Hydra and the baleful Megera came running, and ancient Charon, having left his boat behind.<sup>109</sup>

The Moors gather together to hear the envoy's words and respond with animalistic cries and hisses of rage. Amantius then recounts Antalas'

<sup>107</sup> Contra Cameron (1982), 40: '[the usurpation is] described entirely from the Byzantine point of view'.

<sup>108</sup> *Ioh* II.357–416.

<sup>109</sup> *Ioh* IV.320–5: *cursu rapido Maurusia turba | confluit et nigrae facies tentoria complent: | ut quondam Ditem moturum proelia diuis | concilium fecisse ferunt et mille per amplas | monstra uias uenisse, Hydram tristemque Megaeram | ac Carona senem deserta currere cumba*. On this passage as a *katabasis*, see Gärtner (2015), 330, and Goldlust (2017), 185–6. The more direct intertext is Claud. In Ruf. I.25–122, on which see Goldlust (2017), 186.

response in a tertiary narrative (an account rendered verbatim by a secondary narrator). Corippus does not strain to represent the narrative voice here as especially barbaric, and the passage is rhetorically quite sophisticated.<sup>110</sup> 'Antalas' shifts between the first and third person in his account of recent dealings with the empire, litters his narrative with rhetorical questions and opens on a clear note of irony:

I am all too familiar with the 'faithfulness' of the Roman realm, which was so recently broken. Let no-one imagine that he can betray Antalas any more: it is enough that the Armenian was able to do that once. Do you pretend to be my friends with all your cunning? Was I not yours? Did I not rush to your aid? Did I not carry out your orders carefully? Did I not fight for your commanders, Roman? Your government truly is 'faithful', and your blood, Oh Guarizila, my brother, reveals it – spilled at the order of a villainous officer. So too does the reward that I received from your Armenian, who was only able to crush the tyrant Guntharith through my strength. Is this the reward I deserve for being loyal to a peace between friends, and for often having been the support of your triumphs, because I fought for you? Is this your faithfulness? Is this how you repay your friends?<sup>111</sup>

This passage alludes to several successive stages in Antalas' relationship with the empire. The narrator's insistence that he had acted on Rome's behalf and fought battles for Roman commanders reflects his position as the most powerful imperial supporter in southern Byzacium during the early years of the occupation.<sup>112</sup> We know from Procopius that this fidelity had lasted for around a decade after Belisarius' conquest, as is twice confirmed in Liberatus' earlier digression: first in the prediction of the oracle that Antalas will bear a Roman yoke prior to his revolt, and then in the celebration of the ten years of peace within the region before the plague.<sup>113</sup> Antalas' reference to the murder of his brother is also attested elsewhere. Procopius states that this happened on the orders of Solomon and brought the decade of peace to an end in 544; the blunder is also acknowledged at the start of the catalogue of Moors in *Iohannis* II, where Antalas is introduced as 'the first to begin the

<sup>110</sup> Goldlust (2017), 194.

<sup>111</sup> *Ioh* IV.358–72: *ista mihi satis est Romani cognita regni | nuper rupta fides. ultra nec fallere quisquam | Antalan se posse putet. iam sufficit istud | Armenio licuisse semel. quos fingis amicos | arte mihi? non uester eram? non saepe cucurri? | non iussis merui cautus? non proelia gessi | pro ducibus, Romane, tuis? res publica certe | fida satis, sanguisque tuus, germane, fatetur, | Guarizila, ducis iussu qui fusus iniqui est, | Armenique tui docuit mihi reddita merces, | frangere quod, nisis nostra uirtute, tyrannum | Guntarith hic potuit. paci sic fidus amicae, | sic meritus, uestris quod faui saepe triumphis, | haec ego digna tuli? uobis quia bella peregi, | haecine uestra fides? tales referuntur amici?*

<sup>112</sup> Proc. BV II.12.30. PLRE III. Antalas. <sup>113</sup> *Ioh* III.130–1, 289–92.



war, provoked by his brother's death'.<sup>114</sup> It appears again in Liberatus' analepsis, although here, as we have seen, it is rather overshadowed by the aftermath of the plague and Antalas' role as an agent of Divine Will.<sup>115</sup> There is no doubt, then, that the *dux iniquus* referred to here is Solomon, although his responsibility is never explicitly acknowledged.

Antalas emphasizes a further betrayal which he attributes to the 'Armenian' Artabanes at the time of the Guntharith rising. As we saw in Chapter 2, there is some historical corroboration for his claim. According to Procopius, Antalas initially supported Guntharith's coup but later turned against him when he was not granted the political recognition he had been promised. At this time, he withdrew from Carthage and allied with Marcentius and his loyal troops, only to be forced into flight by an expedition commanded by Artabanes in the name of the Carthaginian tyrant.<sup>116</sup> On the basis of the current passage, Yves Modéran plausibly proposed that Artabanes and Antalas may have come to an arrangement at the time of this expedition, by agreeing that Antalas' authority in Byzacium would be recognized if he did not interfere with Artabanes' subsequent counter-coup against Guntharith.<sup>117</sup> If Artabanes reneged on this deal after the murder of Guntharith and his own elevation to military command, this would provide ample context for Antalas' fury. But Antalas' accusations of Roman infidelity need not refer to a specific episode. In the political confusion of 545–6, the Moorish leader had simply been left out in the cold, despite his professed loyalty to Justinian, and now found himself the target of John's campaign. The next few lines of the poem are badly corrupted but would seem to suggest that Antalas would have particularly relished the chance of a conflict with Artabanes, as would have been the case had he not been recalled to Constantinople and replaced by John Troglita.<sup>118</sup>

Corippus evidently did not intend Antalas' interpretation of events to supplant Liberatus', and the authority of his narrative is qualified in various ways, but his interjection remains important. Amantius' framing narrative, his characterization of the Moorish leader as essentially untrustworthy, and the descriptive setting amidst the infernal howls and hisses of the barbarians in council all undermine the authority of Antalas' speech. Antalas' reference to his own followers as legates and *proceres* (thus echoing the framing of the *Iohannis* as a whole), and to his army as a *res publica*, also position him as a perversion of Roman order and hence an untrustworthy voice.<sup>119</sup> His bold

<sup>114</sup> Proc. *BV* II.22.8; *Ioh* II.27: *primus init bellum, fraterna morte coactus*.   <sup>115</sup> *Ioh* III.384.

<sup>116</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.1–6. See Chapter 2.

<sup>117</sup> Modéran (2003a), 625–6; compare Gärtner (2008), 90, and Goldlust (2017), 195.

<sup>118</sup> *Ioh* IV.386–92; Goldlust (2017), 200–3.   <sup>119</sup> *Ioh* IV.333, 364.

declarations of his inevitable victory over Rome are also known to be false by the primary audience of the *Iohannis* (who listen in the aftermath of his eventual defeat), and cast his reconstruction of the past into further doubt.<sup>120</sup> Yet for all this, the presentation of a 'barbarian' perspective in direct speech necessarily disrupts the sympathies of the audience and repositions their attitude towards other narrative voices, even if only subtly. Procopius accomplished something similar by including a verbatim reproduction of Antalas' letter of 544 to Justinian in the *Vandal War* – a passage which may have influenced Corippus here.<sup>121</sup> Approaches of this kind were relatively common in classical historiography, perhaps most famously in the long speech given to the Briton Calgacus in Tacitus' *Agricola*, where it forms a necessary counterpoint to the imperializing speech of the eponymous general and draws out some of the implicit anxieties in the text.<sup>122</sup> Antalas, it should be said, is no Calgacus, and the *Iohannis* has little of the political cynicism of the *Agricola*, but his brief recasting of events does highlight the constructed nature of Liberatus' earlier explanation of the crisis in Africa. If Antalas' account is not 'what happened', it is a reminder that neither was Liberatus' version of events. Where Liberatus placed particular emphasis on Athanasius' role in the counter-coup, for example – perhaps the feature of his digression with the clearest political implications at the time of the poem's performance – Antalas remains entirely silent on the role of the prefect. Instead, he underscores Artabanes' importance and stresses his own agency in these actions. Conversely, Liberatus has nothing to say about Artabanes' supposed betrayal of Antalas. By framing contradictory stories through the voices of specific characters, Corippus was able to reflect the political cacophony of this period: this was an approach to the past which the conventions of epic enabled and other forms of historiography would not.

### John's View of Events

John Troglita is the third character to be given his personal perspective on these recent events, and his analepsis is arguably the most important. Like the earlier digressions, John's account is ostensibly addressed to the assembled Roman officers prior to the battle in 546. It clarifies the jumbled detail of Liberatus' account and corrects the contrary interpretation of Antalas. He addresses his immediate audience as 'friends' (*socii*), and later as 'friends

<sup>120</sup> Gärtner (2008), 86–92; Caramico (2015), 153–4.      <sup>121</sup> Proc. *BV* II.22.7–10.

<sup>122</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 30–2.

in war and faithful citizens'.<sup>123</sup> John's exclusion of the allied Moors from his address has peculiar implications, as we shall see in Chapter 4, but the identification of the secondary narratees as the citizens and soldiers of Rome is crucial. This firmly identifies the heterogeneous imperial army with the 'Roman' citizens of North Africa (no small thing, as we saw in Chapter 2), and reveals the military framing of the interpretation to follow. He opens with a confident statement about the successes of Roman military valour in the past. As long as the Roman soldier was aggressive towards the rebellious and merciful to the weak, the empire grew. It was only deviation from these traditions that created difficulties:

But whenever loyalty was broken, and the honour due to the emperor did not dominate the mind of the soldier as he prepared for war, whenever he chose plunder and spoil, and desired the rewards of Mars that ran counter to our standards, then the Roman troops, terrified by their own strength, turned their backs and believed that fierce *gentes* had conquered them.<sup>124</sup>

The underlying mantra here is, of course, the famous Virgilian instruction *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* ('to grant the conquered clemency and crush the proud in war'). As we have seen, this is a leitmotif throughout the *Iohannis*, and it is particularly prominent within the present exchange; Amantius had previously articulated his own message to Antalas in very similar terms, and John later goes on to paraphrase Virgil once more in his address to the troops.<sup>125</sup> Here, however, it is John's vehicle for explaining the events of the recent past.

John addresses only two of the many episodes narrated by Liberatus in his account. The first is the coup of Guntharith, who is described only at the moment of his death:

What good did it do to the madman Guntharith to take the title tyrant – he whom the Armenian cast bloodily to the ground? Amidst a banquet and the cups of a festive table, did he not suffer the punishment he deserved for having broken his treaty?<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> *Ioh* IV.407: *socii*; IV.439: *belli socii ciuesque fideles*.

<sup>124</sup> *Ioh* IV.414–19: *sed quotiens dirupta fides, nec principis ullus | uicit honor mentes iam sese ad bella parantes, | dum raptus, dum praeda placet, dum praemia miles | Martia mente cupit nostris contraria signis, | tunc Romana manus propriis conterrita dextris | terga dedit gentesque feras uicisse putauit*.

<sup>125</sup> *Ioh* IV.343–8; IV.439–45.

<sup>126</sup> *Ioh* IV.425–8: *profuit insano nomen quid ferre tyranni | Guntarith, Armenia iacuit qui ex caede uolutus? | nonne epulas inter uel festae pocula mensae | exsoluit meritas pro fracto foedere poenas?*

The second goes back a little further to the rebel Stutias:

Why should I remind you of Stutias, the exile, wandering through so many parts of the earth? He desired so many things, seeking so many vain goals, wishing to take the name of tyrant through an unjust war. What disasters in Libya, what furious outbursts among the *gentes* did he cause, and with how much blood did he stain his sword? He finally fell, belatedly it is true, carried away by the death he deserved, and took upon himself both judgement and punishment.<sup>127</sup>

These references add no historical detail to the information provided by Liberatus or Antalas, but they do set the two revolts of the 540s in a wider political context. Both tyrants, John suggests, met their fate because of their failure to adhere to their treaties. The suggestion is that both placed themselves outside the *Res publica* because of this – they broke treaties with Rome, and hence were punished as *superbi* – but this is certainly not the only implication of these lines. Liberatus' narrative has already made clear that both Guntharith and Stutias were themselves Roman soldiers, and that their rebellions were strengthened by alliances with the local *gentes*. It is this that represents their greater crime, which had led to the weakening of imperial power in the region.

John's summary of the situation in North Africa in these lines is fundamental to the political message of the *Iohannis*. In the general's recasting of Liberatus' narrative, it was not Antalas and the Moors who caused the collapse of African society, but rather the Romans' failure to stick to their founding philosophy: to treat their allies well and their enemies fiercely. In his view, imperial power was weakened by successive rebellions and by alliances with neighbouring groups which did no credit to the state. It is only this failure that led the Roman army to believe 'that the savage *gentes* had in fact beaten it', when this need not have been the case.<sup>128</sup> If, moreover, the disasters that had befallen North Africa were simply the result of the Roman failure to punish those who resisted its rule and honour its obligations to those who did not, then the way forward was clear enough. In the remainder of the *Iohannis*, Corippus goes on to recount John's victories in arms over the rebellious barbarians (albeit with some reverses). The primary narrative also emphasizes John's

<sup>127</sup> *Iob* IV.429–35: *quid Stutiam referam profugum, tot partibus orbis | errantem? dum multa cupit, dum uana requirit, | nomen habere uolens iniusto Marte tyranni, | quas Libyae clades, quos gentibus ille furores | addidit aut quanto maculauit sanguine ferrum? | tardius ille licet, digna sed morte peremptus | occubuit crimenque simul poenasque resumpsit.*

<sup>128</sup> *Iob* IV.419.

maintenance of treaties, whether with subject groups, with his own troops in moments of mutiny or (most crucially of all) with allied Moors. The victories of 546–8 may have been insignificant on a grand scale and done little in themselves to address the social and moral failings Liberatus lamented, but framed in these terms, they could represent a restoration of imperial order. John's recasting of Liberatus' narrative is an essential stage in making this argument.

Corippus' final retrospective on Guntharith's coup underscores this point. This occurs at the start of Book VI, during the truncated civic triumph that celebrated the victory at Antonia Castra. The account of these celebrations dwells on the captive Moors and the splendour of the Roman troops, but also briefly addresses the melancholy reflections of the Carthaginian crowd:

They grieve with feminine piety, recall their earlier misfortunes and recount the evil deeds of the cruel tyrant: how, with the treaty broken, he opened the weakened gates one by one to the *gentes*; the way he betrayed the wretched city, and with what slaughter he plunged it into confusion.<sup>129</sup>

In this case the Carthaginians are the focalizers but not the narrators of this short analepsis; this is their view of the past, but it is not presented in direct speech. As the jostling crowd in a triumph, this group is analogous to the primary narratees of the *Iohannis* – that is, to the Carthaginians who were celebrating John's final victory a few months later and listening to Corippus' epic. Their historical reflections here recall the competing analepses of Book IV, and refer particularly to the events of 545–6. The unnamed *tyrannus* is certainly Guntharith: he is one of several characters identified as a tyrant in the poem, but is the only one to whom the reference to the gates applies. Procopius describes how Guntharith wedged opened the city gates at the start of his revolt in the hope of encouraging Areobindus to take flight, and this must be the episode alluded to here.<sup>130</sup> In this summary, it is the breaking of a *foedus* which marks Guntharith's treachery. Presumably this was a reference to his betrayal of the emperor, rather than to his separate agreements with the *gentes*, but the language remains striking. At the moment of apparent victory, the Carthaginians look back to Guntharith and the fracturing of trust under his regime as the cause of their misfortunes. Once more, the confusing tangle of Liberatus'

<sup>129</sup> *Ioh* VI.69–73: *feminea pietate dolent casusque priores | commemorant narrantque feri malefacta tyranni: | gentibus ut dubias patefecit in ordine portas | foedere dirupto, miseram qua mente sefellit | perfidus aut quantis turbavit cladibus urbem.*

<sup>130</sup> Proc. *BV* II.26.1–4. Guntharith is identified as *tyrannus* at *Ioh* IV.228, 235, 368 and 425. Elsewhere the same term is used to describe Antalas, Stutias, Gelimer and Carcasan.

narrative is simplified and Antalas shifts from the antagonist of the poem to an incidental actor in an essentially Roman story.

In the event, of course, the triumph described in Book VI was to prove premature. Hostilities resumed in 547 and there were to be two further seasons of fighting (and two and a half more books of the *Iohannis*) before the conflict in Africa was finally brought to an end. Despite this, the celebrations after the victory at Antonia Castra represent an important moment in the epic and anticipate both the true end to the narrative and its significance in the wider history of the region. John's campaigns (and hence the epic) will end only with the final ceremonies in Carthage which in turn will mark the moment the broken promises of the past have been repaired and order restored to Africa. Here, the emphasis of the poem therefore switches from the retrospective analepses of Books III and IV, and increasingly looks forward instead to the anticipated future beyond the narrated time of the epic.

### History in the Future Tense: Corippus' Prolepses

Prolepses had always had an important function in Latin epic. Such passages move the narrative beyond the dramatic present and into the anticipated future, and they could look forward to developments within the unfolding story or connect the dramatic time of the narrative to the moment of the poem's composition or reception. Virgil's *Aeneid* hinges on several such narratives and greatly influenced the later poets working in this tradition. The most famous example is perhaps the *ekphrasis* of Aeneas' shield in *Aeneid* VIII, which explores the events of Roman history down to Octavian's triple triumph following his victory at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE.<sup>131</sup> The *parcere subiectis* motif came from another important Virgilian prolepsis, as Aeneas contemplates the parade of Roman heroes yet to be born and the imperial responsibilities of his progeny are explained to him.<sup>132</sup> Unsurprisingly, prolepses are among the most explicitly political sections of many epics as they often relate the narrated events to the world of the poet and his immediate audience. For Virgil, this 'history in the future tense' (in W. H. Auden's formulation) bridged twelve centuries of myth and history to connect the hero to the latest of the Julian line; for Lucan in the *Civil War*, a similar approach helped collapse the temporal distance between the civil war of Julius Caesar and the lived experience under his eventual successor, Nero.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Virg. *Aen.* VIII.626–731.    <sup>132</sup> Virg. *Aen.* VI.756–886.

<sup>133</sup> Luc. *BC* I.33–66. Henderson (2011) assesses the instability of this passage and the differences of interpretation.

For Corippus, of course, the span of time to bridge was much shorter. But although only a few months separated the events of John's campaign from the moment of the poem's first performance, the shift between temporal registers is no less significant. Throughout the epic, the eventual success of John's mission is clear and the audience are aware that the story (if not the epic) is moving inexorably on towards its inevitable culmination in the triumphal ceremony which must follow.<sup>134</sup> As we have seen, the poem establishes that the implied audience of the epic – the primary narratees – are the audience of the triumphal ceremony:

I have presumed noble lords, to tell of the laurels of the victor. In this time of peace, I shall sing festive songs.<sup>135</sup>

Corippus goes on to explain how his poem draws upon – and augments – the wider discourse of triumph in the city at the time:

Victory bestows verses which my learning denies, and our great joys elevate me when I am weary of songs. If Carthage may rejoice in this way amidst its many triumphs, then may I receive the acclaim I deserve, and with it your love.<sup>136</sup>

The same point is reiterated still more directly in the opening lines of the poem proper:

I sing of defeated, scattered and subdued peoples, and a commander who marked his deeds with a great triumph. Once more the Muses yearn to sing of the descendants of Aeneas. A renewed peace comes to Libya with the ending of the wars, and Victory shines more steadily with its two gleaming wings.<sup>137</sup>

And the apostrophe to Justinian also stresses triumphal honours explicitly:

Arise in your triumphs from your high throne, Emperor Justinian, amid them all; happy and victorious impose laws on the defeated tyrants.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Compare Westall (2014) on the triumph as a point of closure in Sil. Ital. *Pun*, 17. The Actian triumph of Virg. *Aen* VIII.714–28 is the closer analogue to Corippus, given its temporal relation to both the main narrative of the poem and the time of composition. On which see Gurval (1998), esp. 209–47. In this context, it is conspicuous that the fragments of the anonymous late fourth-century *Blemyomachia* suggest that poem also ended with a triumph: Steinrück (1999), fr 14; Livrea (1978), 51–3.

<sup>135</sup> *Ioh* Proem 1–2: *Victoris, proceres, praesumpsi dicere lauros: | tempore pacifico carmina festa canam.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ioh* Proem 33–6: *quos doctrina negat confert uictoria uersus, | carminibus fessum gaudia tanta leuant. | gaudeat in multis sic si Carthago triumphis, | sit mihi rite fauor, sit rogo uester amor.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ioh* 1.6–10: *turbatos stratosque cano populosque subactos, | ductorem et magno signantem facta triumpho: | Aeneadas rursus cupiunt resonare Camenae. | reddita pax Libyae bellis cessantibus astat, | certior et geminis fulget Victoria pinnis.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ioh* 1.14–16: *has inter medius solio sublimis ab alto, | Iustiniane, tuis, princeps, assurge triumphis | laetus et infractis uictor da iura tyrannis.*

The last lines of the *Iohannis* are lost. For this reason, we cannot state with confidence where the primary narrative ends: it has been variously suggested that Corippus continued to the triumphal ceremony or that the poem ended with the victory on the battlefield at Campi Catonis.<sup>139</sup> It is also possible that the epic was never finished. But whatever the form of the lost verses at the end of Book VIII, the *story* related in the *Iohannis* ends with the victory ceremony in Carthage. This ending is never in doubt.

This wider chronological framing opens several narrative possibilities within the *Iohannis* which are worth noting briefly. In common with many epics, the *Iohannis* occasionally breaks into metalepsis – that is, it acknowledges the identity of its characters as characters within an epic and hence the function of the poem in memorializing their actions:

[Who could list] those men whom the commander himself bravely struck down? Nameless Marmaridan soldiers perished at the same time. Within my poem I will name a handful among this crowd – those whom fame made prominent, as it flew from the enemy side to the ears of all.<sup>140</sup>

Twice, Corippus conflates the working of such metalepses with the historical circumstances of John's eventual triumph by simultaneously presenting characters as heroes within an epic and as participants in the coming triumph. This is most obvious in one of the few Roman deaths to be narrated in detail, that of the officer Putzintulus in Book VIII, whose dying words are illuminating:<sup>141</sup>

Your victory, citizens, is at hand! Fight, men, and make the nefarious *gentes* my funeral sacrifice! In this way, you will defeat the enemy and I shall witness it, and with greater joy I will make the Laguatan *gentes* part of my triumph in the shadow realm. And with only one man missing, you will be received in a mighty triumph by sublime Carthage with its lofty gates.<sup>142</sup>

Corippus underscores the function his epic will have in the preservation of this memory:

His name will always be blessed after the war, and his death always remembered, as long as our descendants read of fierce wars in the ages to come.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Compare Blänsdorf (1975), 543; Mantke (1990).

<sup>140</sup> *Iob* VIII.529–33: *quosque ipse magister | deiecit uirtute uiros? sine nomine plebes | Marmaridae periere simul. sed carmine paucos | e multis signabo meo, quos fama priores | attulit ad cunctas uoluitans ex hostibus aures.*

<sup>141</sup> Dodi (1986a), 119; Mantke (1990), 331; Riedlberger (2010), 84–5.

<sup>142</sup> *Iob* VIII.497–503: *uictoria, ciues, | uestra manet. pugnat, uiri, gentesque nefandas | inferiis mactate meis. si uincitis hostes, | tum uideo, tum uiuo magis, gaudensque per umbras | Laguatan gentes propriis aptabo triumphis. | at uos incolumes uno minus ardua celsis | excipient portis summo Carthago triumpho.*

<sup>143</sup> *Iob* VIII.507–9: *nomen post bella beatum | semper erit semperque manet memorabile letum, | dum fera bella legent aeuo ueniente minores.*



A similar connection is drawn later in the same book, when the barbarian Zabbas pleads for mercy before John.<sup>144</sup> Here, the epic connection is made solely through an obvious intertext: Zabbas' words are very clearly inspired by the similar plea of Magus in *Aeneid* X, although Aeneas pitilessly killed that supplicant.<sup>145</sup> Zabbas' fate will be happier, and again it is the coming triumph on which he focuses his hope:

[G]rant life to this soul, I beseech you, after its transgressions, and preserve me, victor, for your triumphs after the war. For it would be a pleasure to serve such a man.<sup>146</sup>

John's mercy exemplifies his embodiment of the instruction *parcere subiectos et debellare superbos*, surpassing even his archetype Aeneas.<sup>147</sup> Zabbas may well have appeared in person in John's historical triumph, among the prominent captives taken in the war.<sup>148</sup> In this way, the action described on the battlefield and John's epic heroism is authenticated by reference to the later ceremonial display. Connections like these can be traced throughout the *Iohannis*, as the poem provided a narrative context for the triumph that followed. Corippus' references to Moorish captives, individual Roman commanders and even John's son Peter have plausibly been interpreted as knowing nods to the circumstances of the poem's performance.<sup>149</sup> The inevitable end of the poem is anticipated through the work as a whole.<sup>150</sup>

### *Moorish Triumphs and Prophetic Counterfactuals*

While the triumphal denouement permeates the narrative of the *Iohannis*, the characters within the poem anticipate different futures of their own. In Book VI, Corippus relates the visit of the Moorish leader Carcasan to the oracle of Ammon, and the prophecy he received motivates his followers for

<sup>144</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 421, on Zabbas rather than Diggle and Goodyear's Labbas.

<sup>145</sup> Virg. *Aen.* X. 524–36. Lausberg (1989), 106–7; Schindler (2007), 183; Riedlberger (2010), 421–2.

<sup>146</sup> *Ioh.* VIII. 581–3: *huic animae concede, precor, post crimina uitam | meque tuis, uictor, serua post bella triumphis. | nam tali seruire iuuat.*

<sup>147</sup> Lausberg (1989), 107. <sup>148</sup> Suggested by Riedlberger (2010), 424.

<sup>149</sup> Peter reflects on his own position in an epic at *Ioh.* I. 197–207 and is directly addressed at *Ioh.* VII. 212–18. Compare Riedlberger (2010), 422, and Dorfbauer (2007), 196–200.

<sup>150</sup> A comparable teleology is apparent in other epics, but seems especially clear in the *Iohannis*. Compare Quint (1992), 45: 'Epic draws an equation between power and narrative. It tells of a power able to end the indeterminacy of war and to emerge victorious, showing that the struggle had all along been leading up to its victory and this imposing on it a narrative teleology – the teleology that epic identifies with the very idea of narrative.'

the remainder of the poem.<sup>151</sup> The historical and religious circumstances of this episode are important in themselves and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Here, however, it is worth briefly addressing the prophecy itself. In the context of the epic, this is an emphatic prolepsis which seems to resist the teleology established elsewhere in the work:

At last her shameless voice pronounced the secrets of the fates, whispered through fierce lips: 'The victorious Ilagutan [*sic*] will throw the Latins into confusion, harrying them in a bitter war. The Mazax will hold the fields of Byzacium forever with great honour. Then there will be a nourishing peace and the commander Carcasan, elevated and serene, will enter the lofty citadel of Carthage through open gates, and will be carried through the middle of the city surrounded by his people. Every African will marvel at their terrible appearance, and will hurry forward with palms and laurels upon their arrival. Carthage will be called happy among all peoples. Fear of Carcasan will make the fierce tribes subject, and they shall come to love the treaties that bring peace.'<sup>152</sup>

This prophecy presents an appealing vision to Carcasan, but an appalling one to the primary audience of the *Iohannis*. The apparent prospect of a Moorish victory and the perverse image of Carthage bowing in obeisance to a barbarian triumph motivates the rebels in the second part of the epic as well as adding to the dramatic tension of the work. Inevitable as the Roman victory may seem, this fleeting vision of Moorish success offers a glimpse of an alternative future, especially coming as it does immediately after the truncated Roman triumph at the start of Book VI.

This dramatic tension is defused, however, by the gloss which follows. Here, Corippus switches narrative voice to clarify the irony of this prophecy with a prolepsis of his own. He was perhaps inspired here by a similar narratological undercutting in one of Claudian's poems:<sup>153</sup>

While the priestess chanted these things, a disturbing spirit obstructed her speech and deceived unhappy minds with falsehood. With these lies, false

<sup>151</sup> *Ioh* VI.166–76. The possible location of the oracle and the historical significance of this episode are discussed in Chapter 6. Nesselrath (1992) explores the significance of 'almost episodes' (*Beinabe-Episoden*) in classical epic with a brief discussion of Corippian moments at 141–3. See also Nesselrath (2019).

<sup>152</sup> *Ioh*. VI.164–76: *uox improba tandem | prodidit ore fero fatorum arcana sub auras: | 'uictor Ilaguatensis acerbo Marte Latinos | conturbabit agens. aeterno tempore Mazax | Byzacii campos magna uirtute tenebit. | tunc erit alma quies. celsas Carthaginis arces | Carcasan ductor portis ingressus apertis, | altior et placidus, populo comitante feretur | urbem per mediam. uultus mirabitur Afer | terribiles. lauros current palmasque ferentes | huius in aduentu. felix Carthago per omnes | dicitur populos. Carcasan terror acerbas | subiciet gentes, et foedera pacis amabunt.'*

<sup>153</sup> Compare Claud. *In Ruf.* II.331–3 and Hadjú (2001), 168–9.

Ammon deceived the Massylian *gentes*: chanting the truth, while shrouding it in murkiness and preparing his traps. The *Mauri* did hold the fields of Byzacium forever, and will always hold them, because their bones now lie there broken by the strength of the great John. And the commander Carcasan did pass within the lofty citadel of Carthage, elevated and surrounded by his people, and then – when his neck was cut – all Africa saw his head fixed to a rigid pole.<sup>154</sup>

Ostensibly a counterfactual view of the future, this passage in fact reaffirms the metanarrative of the *Iohannis*. This is a story which can only end in Roman victory, and the poet breaks cover here to emphasize this point directly. The Moors will indeed ‘drive off the Latins in confusion’ in the conflict, which is narrated in the remainder of Book VI. Thereafter, however, the anticipated Roman triumph will still come to pass, and the treaties which secure its peace will be reinforced.

Corippus was sufficiently pleased with this conceit to return to it later in the poem. In Book VII, after his capture by Roman troops, the Moorish leader Varinnus reiterates his belief in the prophecy and identifies it as the motivation for the revolt. Again, the focal image is of Carcasan in triumph:

In this way, prophetic Ammon chanted to our tribes, giving the fields of Byzacium to the *Mauri* in war: proud Carcasan was to pass among the Libyan people and peace to be restored to the world.<sup>155</sup>

The emphasis on Carcasan’s pride (*superbus*) betrays the eventual role he must play in the triumph to come. Nevertheless, in the closing lines of the book, John provides a further explanatory gloss immediately before he effectively realizes one part of the prophecy by executing the Moorish captives:

[John] began to speak as follows: ‘This will allow you to hold our fields all the better.’ With these words, he ordered five stakes to be erected in a row, and had the necks of those who were to die to be suspended from two-pronged shafts. At the sudden command, his attendants swiftly did this.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> *Ioh.* VI.177–87: *dum canit haec vates, conturbans spiritus ora | obstruit et miseram mentes errore fefellit. | his gentes fallax decepti fraudibus Ammon | Massylas, dum uera canens caligine uestit | insidiasque parat. nam Mauri tempore cuncto | Byzacii tenuere quidem semperque tenebunt | ossibus arua suis, magni uirtute Iohannis | quae modo fracta iacent. celsas Carthaginis arces | Carcasan ductor populis comitantibus altus | per medias ibat, tunc cum ceruice recisa | infixum rigido uidit caput Africa conto.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ioh.* VII.515–18: *cecinit sic gentibus Ammon | fatidicus nostris, donans per proelia Mauris | Byzacii campos, Carcasan ire superbum | per Libyos populos et pacem reddere mundo.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ioh.* VII.538–42: *sic ora resoluit: | ‘tut magis hos nostros teneatis certius agros.’ | sic ait et quinque erectis iubet ordine lignis | stipite suspendi morientum colla bicorni | iussu praecipiti: celeres fecere ministri.*

An earlier Moorish prophecy concerning Antalas' rise and fall is related by Liberatus in the digression of Book III, and occupies a different position in the narrative of the *Iohannis*.<sup>157</sup> The dramatic date of this prophecy is around 500, and it relates largely to the period between Antalas' youth and the conflict of 546 (i.e., the dramatic date at which Liberatus' digression is set). It sketches a history of North Africa in this period, which is then filled out by the remainder of the tribune's digression. Its final note, however, anticipates the resolution of the final conflict, which still lies in the future at the time of Liberatus' speech. Again, this is framed in the language of humbled pride, triumphal spoils and the buried dead of the African frontier:

And why does he rise to such heights only to fall back again? See how he departs from our land, puffed up and burdened with plunder, finally returning – alas! – to drench the fields with our blood.<sup>158</sup>

The religious implications of the Moorish oracles, which might seem to lend a troubling authority to the prophecies of disgraced pagan gods, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6. In their literary context, however, the function of these proleptics is clear. They confirm the broad narrative structure of the *Iohannis* – from the narrated events of the battlefield to the moment of performance – while also creating a dramatic stage on which the different antagonists can act.

Corippus also shaped specific passages within his epic to fit his wider narrative ambitions. A case in point is the so-called catalogue of tribes at the start of Book II, which purports to outline the barbarians who fought at Antonia Castra (the battle related in Book V), and which has been central to several analyses of the ethnography of the *Iohannis*.<sup>159</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 4, this catalogue includes a wealth of detail on the Moorish world that would otherwise be lost to us, but the structure of the account – the order in which the different groups are presented – has caused scholars some difficulty. If the catalogue is interpreted geographically, as a systematic survey of the frontier regions of Africa, as was widely the case in much twentieth-century scholarship, it might provide vital data on the populations of this world and how they related to one another. More recent studies have suggested that the passage was structured historically – as a systematic checklist of the different Moorish groups in the order in which they joined

<sup>157</sup> *Iob* III.107–40.

<sup>158</sup> *Iob* III.137–40: *quid tantum surgit in altum | unde cadat rursus? nostris praesumptus ab aruis | en spoliis oneratus abit, tandemque reuersus | proluit, heu, nostro concretos sanguine campos!*

<sup>159</sup> *Iob* II.27–161.

the rebellion of 546.<sup>160</sup> This could alternatively tell us a great deal about the political relationships that bound these populations together and how they were viewed from Carthage.

Viewed in the narrative context of the *Iohannis*, however, a third possibility emerges. Although Corippus was certainly influenced by earlier poetic lists in composing this passage, the structure and details of his own catalogue are remarkably similar to the types of ethnographic and geographical trophies which are known to have been included in triumphal processions.<sup>161</sup> As we will discuss, it seems just as likely that Corippus took as much inspiration from the information included in John's final triumph as he did from any campaign notebooks or other military intelligence available to him. For if the 'tribal' catalogue of Book II was inspired in this way – and was consciously intended to reflect the later ceremony – the dramatic function of the passage is much greater. In this reading, by providing the list Corippus effectively underscored two of the principal narrative themes of the *Iohannis* as a whole: that the proud Moors were destined for inevitable defeat and that this was to be resolved in the final victory ceremony. The image of Moors proudly marching to war while simultaneously rehearsing their positions as trophies in the Roman triumph, corresponds closely to the ironic tone of his later proleptic prophecies and cements the confident message given at the start of the primary narrative. The full implications of this reading (and the evidence in support of it) will be examined in detail in Chapter 4. But it is the understanding of the wider narrative strategies of the epic that provides the space for this interpretation.

### Conclusions

Corippus was not a historian, but this makes the *Iohannis* all the more significant as a meditation upon the recent past. The panegyric aspects of the epic have long been recognized, and it is often assumed that the poem was entirely chauvinistic in its treatment of the imperial occupation. But Corippus' treatment of the earlier Byzantine period – primarily in the analepsis of Books III and IV, but also in the parallel accounts of the same events in the voices of other characters – acknowledges both the fragility of imperial rule in Africa and the contemporary sensitivity to this. In this framing, the latter years of the Vandal period were remembered with a fond nostalgia which eclipsed even the happy early months of imperial

<sup>160</sup> The bibliography is discussed in Chapter 4.      <sup>161</sup> Merrills (2019) and Chapter 4.

rule for their peace and plenty. The key turning point in this history was Antalas' defeat of a Vandal army and the overthrow of the last legitimate Hasding monarch, rather than the imperial invasion which was so central in the ideology of Constantinople. Thereafter, the analepsis does celebrate the imperial peace, but tempers this with a lurking sense of dread and ends it with a cataclysm of plague, social collapse and internecine fighting. The Moorish leader Antalas is a catalyst for this but is scarcely the sole cause of African ills, which are as much internal as external.

Corippus' presentation of this through the voice of the African Liberatus allows the poet to distance the analepsis from the more celebratory tone of much of the rest of the poem. The repeated interrogation of the same events through the accounts of Antalas and John also creates space for the poet to explore the different resonances that the events of the recent past had across imperial Africa. Ultimately, it is John's interpretation which clarifies the message at the heart of this unhappy history: Africa was in peril, not because of the actions of the rebellious Antalas, but because the Romans themselves had forgotten the principles on which their power was founded. In doing so, John establishes the grounds on which peace will be restored – by granting the conquered clemency (and honouring treaties), quite as much as crushing the proud in war.

The temporal conventions of epic also demanded that Corippus connect the events of the primary narrative to their final denouement – in victory, the formal triumphal ceremony and the eventual commemoration of all of this within the poem. The proleptic glimpses of the celebrations to come, variously made through direct reference, counterfactual prophecy and the subtle deployment of triumphal imagery, made the poet and his audience active participants within the epic, just as Liberatus' lament had made them complicit in the disasters that had befallen Africa.

*Corippus and the Moorish World*

The political and social landscape of North Africa was immensely varied in the middle decades of the sixth century. Imperial power had always been unevenly felt across this vast region. Roman Africa had been relatively lightly militarized, with the result that local power brokers enjoyed considerable autonomy, particularly in upland regions and those distant from the formal apparatus of imperial government.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the political and military pull of Carthage remained real: both Roman and later Vandal authorities in the city offered leaders from across the region forms of legitimation including titles, alliances and offices of state, as well as the possibility of participating in military action. The Byzantine occupation of 533 forced the sudden recalibration of a swathe of political relations across much of the region. Landlords and warlords, leaders of pastoralist groups and settled communities variously sought support from the new imperial power, positioned themselves in opposition to it, and responded to the similar strategies of their neighbours and rivals.<sup>2</sup> Solomon's campaigns into Byzacium and Numidia in 535 and 539/40 consolidated alliances but also created new enmities, and the succession of political crises in Carthage and across the army of occupation added further twists to the political kaleidoscope. Alliance with Belisarius, Solomon or Guntharith offered status for some, but could alienate others. Moorish leaders like Antalas, Cusina or Iaudas variously found themselves in support of Justinian's representatives, the local usurpers or mutineers who challenged this authority, or as interested bystanders as these struggles played out, in the hope of finding

<sup>1</sup> The focus of the present chapter is on the regions which fell under the direct shadow of imperial control after 533/4, or which were part of the wider penumbra. This was the region known to Corippus, for which the *Iohannis* is an important source. Modéran (2003a) is the most important survey of this region in late antiquity, and Merrills (2022a) is a recent overview with full bibliography. 'Moorish' Africa stretched far beyond this, of course. See especially Camps (1984), (1985) and (1988c); Merrills (2017b) and Hamdoune (2018) on the Mauretanian provinces in this period; and the various observations of Conant (2012), 252–305, and Morizot (2015). Shaw (2014) and Whittaker (2009) provide excellent overviews.

<sup>2</sup> Merrills (2021a) on the impact of the imperial presence after 533. And see also (more generally) Ferguson and Whitehead (1999), and the essays collected therein.

advantage for themselves. As loyalties on both sides changed from year to year and season to season, different forms of collective affiliation might be established or activated. The changing nuances of this world were perplexing to outsiders. This was true for Corippus, who wrote about this world, and for his antagonist John Troglita who lived and fought within it. Crucially, it is no less true for modern commentators who seek to make sense of it for themselves and depend in large part on the *Iohannis* to do so.

Corippus' representation of the Moorish inhabitants of Africa is one of the most challenging aspects of the *Iohannis* to understand, but among the most important. His is one of the very few textual accounts we have of 'Moorish' or 'Berber' North Africa from the first millennium CE, and it is unusually rich in much of its detail. The *Iohannis* has consequently been central to modern scholarship on these societies. But the poem is not the straightforward text some commentators might prefer, and more often proves something of a false friend. Evidently, the poet did not conceptualize the African hinterland primarily as a neatly tessellating map of named African peoples, each with its own leader, as has become conventional in some modern representations of this region. Nor did he regard the construction of a coherent portrait of this world as one of his responsibilities as an epic poet. Corippus certainly had access to reliable contemporary information on African populations: he includes twenty-four distinct ethnonyms which are unique to the poem, and many details of contemporary life which seem trustworthy. But this material was often transmitted in a distorted form, whether through the poet's own assumptions as an inhabitant of Carthage or through the distorting prism of Roman military reports and triumphal parades which informed him of this world. Corippus complicated this further with archaic terminology, including names which first appeared in classical writing from the fifth century BCE, and others which had become commonplaces in Latin epic in the period since. The result is a confusing and many-layered ethnographic palimpsest.

Most of the ethnographic material within the *Iohannis* relates to the populations living in southern Byzacium, Tripolitania and the territories of Syrtica beyond. Occasional reference is made to groups from Numidia, most notably in the case of Cusina, who held a position in the north of that province, and the inhabitants of the Aurès highlands in the south, but the majority of the epic is concerned with the territories of John Troglita's campaigns. This was a diverse region and included populations living on both sides of the Roman frontier, with a range of political loyalties. In the simplest possible terms, Corippus regarded all of the Africans who lived across this region as 'Moors' (*Mauri* or *Maurusiae*). This included the great



antagonists of the *Iohannis* and their followers – Antalas and Ierna in the first half of the epic, Carcasan in the second half – but it was not limited to those who took up arms against the empire. Corippus uses the same language when referring to the imperial allies Cusina and Ifisdaias, and these leaders were vital to the imperial programme. The same terms also encompassed those groups whose status changed over the course of John's campaign (and the epic), including Iaudas, who sided with Antalas in 546 but fought with the Romans in 548, and the Astrices, whose precise affiliations are not clear.

For Corippus, by far the most important distinction within this world was political rather than cultural, social or geographical. Here, we witness once more the importance of the Virgilian refrain on the obligations of Roman power: *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* ('to protect the subject and crush the proud'), which runs through the *Iohannis*.<sup>3</sup> Fundamental to Corippus' ethnographic understanding is the distinction between the *subiecti* among the Moors – those groups who willingly deferred to Roman power and fought alongside the imperial army – and the *superbi*, who refused. The story of the *Iohannis* is the victory over these *superbi*, with the willing support of Moorish *subiecti*. Corippus was much less concerned with other oppositions within his poem, including the ways in which the *Mauri* as a whole might be distinguished from other groups. At times in the *Iohannis*, the *Mauri* are contrasted with the *Afri* (probably to be read as the civilian provincial subjects of the empire), *cives* (citizens, and perhaps especially those living in towns) and *Romani* ('Romans', but often used to refer to imperial soldiers in arms). These give us broad points of reference for thinking about what 'Moorishness' was in this period (at least in the eyes of this poet), but none is applied consistently throughout the epic, and it seems unlikely that broad identities of this kind were absolutely clear-cut.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars have also suggested that Corippus was concerned to distinguish between *Mauri* living within the imperial frontiers and those beyond (especially in eastern Tripolitania and Syrtica). As we shall see, groups from different parts of the frontier region were certainly very different, and the poet and his characters appreciated this, but again this is not a primary point of differentiation within the *Iohannis*.<sup>5</sup> For Corippus, only political fealty – the distinction between the proud and the humble – really mattered.

<sup>3</sup> Virg. *Aen* VI.851–3. On this motif in the *Iohannis*, see the discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Zarini (2005) provides a helpful overview of this. The same scholar adopts a more binary view of Corippus' epic in his discussion of religious themes (e.g., Zarini (2006) and Zarini (2010)), for understandable reasons, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> This is the distinction which underpins the monumental study of Modéran (2003a). The implications are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Precisely how all of these related on the ground is often confusing, and specific cases illustrate this well. Antalas is the most prominent Moorish leader within the text and is closely associated with the Frexes, a group generally located near Thelepte in southern Byzacium.<sup>6</sup> In his first reported speech in the *Iohannis*, however, Antalas styles himself leader of the Laguatan – a group or federation generally assumed to have lived hundreds of miles to the south-east in the pre-desert beyond the Tripolitanian frontier.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, Ierna is identified as leader and priest of the Ilguas (an alternative name for the same group), but after his death he is specifically described as ‘King of the Marmarides’, associating him with an ancient ethnonym generally associated with groups living still further east.<sup>8</sup> Nor are Corippus’ sociological details any more consistent: the Moors are described as pastoralists or nomads, but they are scattered across desert and pre-desert, mountain, forest and plain, and explicit reference is made on occasion to the farming of crops.<sup>9</sup> While this certainly reflects the diversity of the populations living in this world, where sedentary and pastoralist populations were inextricably intermingled, the poet makes little effort to distinguish group from group. Many of his barbarians are remarkable in their appearance – and multiple references are made to their black or dark skin – but the poet also emphasizes the variety here and stresses the diversity of their clothing and weaponry. In the tumult of the battlefield, moreover, the Moors are frequently said to be indistinguishable from their Roman opponents.<sup>10</sup>

For entirely understandable reasons, most modern scholars have been more interested in the historical reality of the Moorish world in the sixth century (to the extent that this can be known) than they have been in unpacking the Corippus’ confusing representation of these groups. But this process is substantially complicated by the fact that the *Iohannis* is our single most important textual source on local North African societies in the pre-Islamic period. There are other important sources to be sure, not least the various prose works of Procopius, a range of epigraphy and a developing corpus of archaeological information, all of which can corroborate or contradict the image provided by Corippus.<sup>11</sup> Wide reference has also been made to anthropological studies, from both the modern

<sup>6</sup> Desanges (1998); Desanges (1998b). Von Rummel (2010) surveys the scholarship. See also Merrills (2018), 372–80.

<sup>7</sup> *Ioh* I.467: *Laguatan gentis . . . ductor*. <sup>8</sup> *Ioh* II.106–9; V.520–1: *Marmaridum rex*.

<sup>9</sup> Compare for example *Ioh* II.151–3; VI.197–200.

<sup>10</sup> Corippus’ battlefield accounts are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> Hamdoune (2018) focused primarily on Mauretanian regions beyond Corippus’ purview and brilliantly demonstrates how many different textual and archaeological sources can combine to illuminate a social world without reference to the *Iohannis*.

Maghreb and other regions, with illuminating results.<sup>12</sup> But the *Iohannis* remains fundamental. Joseph Partsch and Martin Riedmüller both based their discussions of the Berber world on the text, particularly on the so-called catalogue of tribes in Book II.<sup>13</sup> Charles Diehl made similar use of the same passage, regarding it as valuable for depicting more or less timeless features of Berber society.<sup>14</sup> Yves Modéran's monumental study of 2003 took Corippus and Procopius – but especially the Latin poet – as both the starting point and the endpoint for deep dive into Moorish late antiquity, and many of his shorter studies are similarly indebted to the poem.<sup>15</sup>

Like Corippus and the characters in his epic, modern scholars have imposed their own conceptual frameworks onto the Moorish world in an effort to make sense of it. The principal challenge that they have faced in appreciating Corippus as a source, however, is that the ways in which the poet ordered his discussion do not match their own. In response, commentators have frequently lamented the shortcomings of the poet's account and his apparent indifference to details that they deem essential, before selectively sifting the *Iohannis* for evidence to support their own interpretations. Material which does not fit the preferred model can then be ignored entirely, or dismissed as the product of Corippus' literary sensibilities or his misunderstanding of the reality of regions distant from Carthage. As a result, the *Iohannis* has been confidently cited in support of entirely contradictory interpretations of Moorish society. The text has been used to show the essentially unchanging nature of settled Moorish (or 'Berber') groups from prehistory to the modern period, but also a tectonic population shift from the Sahara to the settled zone which changed the human geography of the region profoundly.<sup>16</sup> Scholars in

<sup>12</sup> The history of Maghrebian anthropology was entangled with the colonial occupation of the region and profoundly shaped modern understanding of 'the Berbers'. Much of this scholarship was focused on the regions substantially west of those discussed in the *Iohannis*, particularly Kabylia and the Atlas, but the conclusions drawn from this work often proved disconcertingly mobile. For an overview of the development of this tradition and its connections to archaeology, see especially Camps (1988b); Boetsch and Ferrie (1989); Lorcin (1995); Lorcin (2002); Fentress (2006) and Fenwick (2008); on the creation of 'Berber' as an oppositional category, see McDougall (2003) and McDougall (2010), and (in its wider historical context) Rouighi (2019) and the essays in Valérian (2021). For the historical situatedness of the work of Bourdieu and postcolonial scholars, and the implications of their views of Berber 'timelessness', see Scheele (2009) and the vivid discussion of Roberts (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Partsch (1896); Reidmüller (1919).

<sup>14</sup> Diehl (1896), 301–6; compare also Courtois (1955), 347–8.

<sup>15</sup> Modéran (2008a), and compare Modéran (1986), (1991), (2003b), (2004), (2008a), (2008b) and (2008c).

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Morizot in Leveau et al. (1990), cc.28–9 with the comments of Modéran (2003a), 56, and Modéran (2008b); Mattingly (1983); Fentress and Wilson (2016), 62; and compare Fentress (2019), 515–16.

the nineteenth century used the poem to demonstrate the validity of prevalent models of timeless 'tribal' structures across North Africa, but those working in the twentieth also found evidence for the segmentary lineage systems contemporary anthropologists had developed.<sup>17</sup> The *Iohannis* has been invoked to explain both the appearance of Moorish 'kings' in the sixth century and their absence, and has also been used to discuss collaborative rule by councils of elders.<sup>18</sup> And during the early years of the twenty-first century, the poem was also crucial in the debate over the validity (or otherwise) of contemporary models of ethnogenesis to the study of the African frontier.<sup>19</sup>

Corippus used a rich ethnographic lexicon to identify the participants in his epic drama. He uses generic terminology to refer to all Africans under arms – ally and antagonist alike – but complements this with more precise language to refer to specific federations, groups and subgroups. Some of these labels appear repeatedly throughout the *Iohannis*, others appear only once; some are evidently derived from contemporary sources, others from the classical poetic tradition; some terms clearly relate only to specific groups, others are also deployed metonymically to refer to all hostile Moors (and sometimes all Moors regardless of political loyalty) together. This bewildering fluidity has frustrated modern commentators, but has also been a starting point for ingenious and often brilliant exegesis. While ephemeral patterns may sometimes be traced through this glorious profusion, however, the overall impression given by the *Iohannis* is of a complex and socially intricate world, and this is important in itself. In presenting the African war zone as a teeming world of barbaric populations, bound to one another in arcane ways and frequently ambivalent in their loyalties, Corippus accentuated both the magnitude of the task which faced John Troglita in 546 and the scale of his accomplishment in bringing peace to imperial Africa.

The present chapter seeks to navigate this maze by looking first at the ways in which Corippus presented the Moorish world as a whole – ally and enemy alike – within the poem. This is crucial to appreciating the essential point that the *Iohannis* is not a poem of 'Roman' against 'Moor', but rather of the loyal (or humble) against the proud. It then looks at some of the precise ethnographic language used by the poet. It explores first Corippus' inheritance of classical epic ethnonyms, and notes that these are used with

<sup>17</sup> Tribes: Partsch (1896); Reidmüller (1919); segmentary systems: Mattingly (1995), 173–6; Modéran (2003a), 422–38, especially 427, albeit with some acknowledgement of the variety between groups.

<sup>18</sup> Absence of kings: Merrills (2021a). Elders: Shaw (1991–5b), especially 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ethnogenesis: Modéran (2003b); von Rummel (2010) and compare Waldherr (2006).

surprising restraint within the *Iohannis*. It then examines the peculiar treatment of the Laguatan – certainly an active group in the middle of the sixth century and (in its many variant forms) one of the most common ethnonyms within the epic, but one which is not directly attested in any other source. The new importance of the Laguatan (termed the *Leuathai* by Procopius) is certainly connected to social and political changes in Syrtica and Tripolitania from the end of the third century, but the precise importance of this identity may be less clear than some scholars have maintained. It is suggested here that Corippus may be testimony to a flexible form of social affiliation which transcended old political boundaries thanks to the mobility of many of the groups involved. Finally, the chapter looks at the longest sustained ethnographic passage in the epic, the so-called catalogue of tribes in Book II. This section contains many of the unique ethnonyms within the *Iohannis*, and has long been interpreted as a more or less faithful outline of the frontier zone in the mid-sixth century, but rather less attention has been paid to the likely source of Corippus' information here, or to the function of the passage within his epic. It is argued here that Corippus' most likely source of information on these groups was the triumph or *adventus* ceremony which marked the end of John's campaign after 548, and that the catalogue was deliberately intended to evoke this parade. Corippus' intention here was not to present a coherent geographical overview of the African frontier, as has sometimes been supposed, but rather to add another proleptic element to his unfolding narrative.

### The Proud and the Humble: 'Moors' in the *Iohannis*

The basic language deployed within the *Iohannis* is straightforward enough. *Gens/gentes* is the most common term and is used throughout the poem to refer to the inhabitants of North Africa generally, including those who fought alongside the Romans, as well as those in arms against the empire.<sup>20</sup> This was widespread in Latin writing of the imperial period to refer to barbarian groups collectively, and is most commonly translated into English as 'people(s)' or 'tribe(s)', but lacked the pejorative associations of the latter term, and did not necessarily imply a society structured primarily around kinship or descent. Corippus also refers to groups outside North Africa as *gentes*, and the *gens* had long been a basic ancestral (and political) unit of Roman society.<sup>21</sup> Its association with hostile barbarism is

<sup>20</sup> Andres (1993), 191–5, provides a full list.

<sup>21</sup> Desanges (1992); Hamdoune (1998); Modéran (2003a), 418–20.

mainly accomplished in the *Iohannis* through modifying adjectives. The opening line of the poem refers to *gentes . . . feras* ('fierce peoples'), and this epithet recurs multiple times over the course of the poem.<sup>22</sup> We hear repeatedly of *gentes nefandae* ('abominable' or 'unclean' peoples), and to 'savage', 'proud' and 'unconquered' groups (among many other terms).<sup>23</sup> Frequent reference is made to the numbers of the barbarians in arms – to *innumerae* or *multae gentes* and to the impossibility of containing them within the pages of his poem – a familiar epic trope.<sup>24</sup> But the allied Moors who fought alongside the Romans are also consistently referred to as *gentes*, particularly in the second half of the poem.<sup>25</sup> Here too their numbers and variety are commonly stressed along with their valour on the battlefield, but the essential connection between allies and enemies is also underscored. The net result is to cast the African frontier zone as barbaric, thickly populated and varied world, but one with mixed political loyalties, and to emphasize that area lay within the imperial aegis.

This image is reinforced by Corippus' use of common ethnonyms. *Maurus/i* and its variant *Maurusius/i* are used throughout the poem to refer to groups from across the whole of North Africa, regardless of their political affiliation.<sup>26</sup> By the sixth century, this was the generic term for inhabitants of all of the African provinces, and not just the Mauretians: Procopius, for example, consistently refers to *Maurusioi*, and the *Mauri* appear in other chronicles, histories and inscriptions of the period.<sup>27</sup> Corippus refers at several points to the dark skin of the *Mauri*, and in a striking passage in the opening book, introduces a demon 'with a face that seemed Moorish, coloured black like darkness'.<sup>28</sup> Black skin had often stood as a negative signifier in the art and literature of Roman and Vandal Africa, and Corippus evidently drew upon this tradition.<sup>29</sup> He describes

<sup>22</sup> *Ioh* I.1; I.20; I.54; III.395; IV.546; VI.226; compare VI.312; VIII.232.

<sup>23</sup> *Nefandus*: *Ioh* II.192; VIII.2; VIII.28; VIII.276. *saeus* IV.282 (and *passim*); *malignus* VIII.217; *superbus* IV.124; *Invictis*; *indomitae*: VI.108; VI.554. On this rhetoric, compare Burck (1979), 397–8; Opelt (1982–3); Mantke (1996); Modéran (2003a), 40; Riedlberger (2010), 108–12.

<sup>24</sup> Compare *Ioh* III.123f; IV.546. Zarini (1997), 60.

<sup>25</sup> Allied *gentes*: *Ioh* III.410; IV.544–52; VII.62–6; VII.69; VII.76; VII.250–I; VII.260–I; VII.282; VIII.121–6; VIII.188; VIII.200.

<sup>26</sup> Partsch (1896), 21; Riedlberger (2010), 45–6.

<sup>27</sup> Proc. *BV* II.10.13–29 and *passim*. Conant (2012), 273–4.

<sup>28</sup> Dark skin: *Ioh* II.137; IV.321; VIII.415. *Niger* (black) is repeatedly used as an adjective to describe individuals, *Ioh* V.341; VII.426; VIII.415, 482, 594; and the Moors collectively: *Ioh* I.245; IV.321. Long hair: V.113; VIII.193. Partsch (1896), 29; Fevrier (1985), 295–6; Castronuovo (1997) 408–11. Demonic apparition: *Ioh* I.244–5. On this passage, see Chapter 6.

<sup>29</sup> AL R182 / S 172; R183 / S 173; R329 / S324; R353 / S 348. See especially Desanges (1976); Kay (2006), 325–32; and now Starks (2011) for a thoughtful analysis and translation of the relevant epigrams in the *Latin Anthology*.

the ‘horrid’ (*horrida*) women borne in triumph at the start of Book VI, and their children ‘with black skin like young crows’, but also stresses that not all were of the same colour.<sup>30</sup> Corippus deploys a circumscribed range of adjectives in describing the Moors, including *saeuus* (savage),<sup>31</sup> *fēra* (fierce)<sup>32</sup> and *ravidus* (raving),<sup>33</sup> and assertions of specifically Moorish arrogance, impiety, deceit and treachery are commonplace.<sup>34</sup> But the loyal Africans are also unambiguously presented as *Mauri* or *Maurusii* within Corippus’ account.<sup>35</sup> The federates Cusina and Ifisdaia and their followers are explicitly identified as such, and the commonplaces *acies* or *agmina Maurusia / Maurorum* (Maurusian or Moorish battle line or troop), muster on both sides of the battlefield.<sup>36</sup>

Corippus also uses the terms *Massylus/i* and the singular *Mazax* to refer to African combatants as a whole, regardless of their exact origins.<sup>37</sup> These terms are used as synonyms for *Maurus/i* and are used in exactly the same way.<sup>38</sup> While both refer most frequently to hostile barbarians, they are also applied to Cusina and other Roman allies.<sup>39</sup> In using this language, Corippus clearly deferred to poetic convention rather than contemporary political usage (although, of course, the two may have been blurred in the vocabulary of Byzantine Carthage). At the time of the Punic Wars, the *Massyli* had a kingdom of their own in the south and east of what was later to become the Roman province of Numidia, but in later Roman writing, the name was rapidly decontextualized.<sup>40</sup> *Mauri* and *Massyli* are used interchangeably in the *Aeneid*, as Servius noted in his fourth-century commentary on that work, and later epic poets followed this precedent.<sup>41</sup> For understandable reasons, poets also commonly confused the *Massyli*

<sup>30</sup> *Ioh* VI.92–95: *nec color ipse fuit captiuis omnibus unus. | concolor illa sedet cum nigris horrida natis, | coruorum ueluti uideas nigrescere pullos | matre sedente super.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ioh* II.11; IV.65. <sup>32</sup> *Ioh* IV.51–2. <sup>33</sup> *Ioh* IV.27

<sup>34</sup> See for example *Ioh* I.529–32; I.555; I.537–8; II.408.

<sup>35</sup> *Ioh* II.435–6; III.406; VI.596–600; VIII.192; VIII.443.

<sup>36</sup> Hostile: *Ioh* I.529; I.574; II.471; compare IV.320 [*Maurusia turba*]; IV.627; V.37; VI.9–10 [*Maurorum ... agmina*]; VI.731. Allied: VII.262–3; VIII.127–8 [*Maurusia ... agmina*]; VIII.472–3 [*Maurusia ... agmina*].

<sup>37</sup> *Massylus/i*: I.470; I.530–1; IV.136–7; IV.150; VI.49–51; VI.81–2; VI.179–1; VI.536; VI.570–1; VII.102–3; VII.370; VIII.522. *Mazax*: *Ioh* I.549; V.80; V.376; VI.44; VI.167; VIII.305. Riedmüller (1919), 14; Riedlberger (2010), 140.

<sup>38</sup> Compare for example *Ioh* I.549–55 and IV.150–4, where *Mazax* and *Massylus* are used interchangeably with *Maurus*.

<sup>39</sup> *Massylus/i*: IV.509–14; VI.267–8; VI.517; VII.471–4; VIII.43; VIII.185; VIII.202. *Mazax*: VI.450; VI.600.

<sup>40</sup> Desanges (1962), 109–10.

<sup>41</sup> Virg. *Aen* IV.132; IV.483; VI.60; Serv *Ad. Aen.* VI.60. Lucan, *BC* IV.682; Sil Ital *Pun* I.101; III.282; IX.224; XVI.170–84; XVI.252–5; XVI.447; XVII.127–8; XVII.172; Claudian, *Bell. Gild.* 284. Sidonius, *Carm.* V.346; compare Modéran (2003a), 449–50; Riedlberger (2010), 140.



with the neighbouring *Masaesylii* even when describing specific historical figures.<sup>42</sup> Corippus' use of the singular *Mazax* to stand for the *Mazaces* (or perhaps *Mazices*) also follows well-established poetic tradition. The group appears as such in the epics of Lucan and Claudian, and in the late-third century *Cynegetica* of the African poet Nemesianus.<sup>43</sup> Groups called the *Mazices* had been located by ancient geographical writers across Mauretania and around the Syrtic Gulf, but the label was also commonly used as a generic term for African barbarians.<sup>44</sup>

Corippus' references to Moorish speech language also encompass allies and enemies alike. Distaste for the cacophonous sounds of Moorish speech are associated principally with the massed ranks of the hostile barbarian army for obvious reasons, but the allies would have spoken similar dialects and their names would scarcely have been more pleasing to refined Carthaginian ears.<sup>45</sup> The occasional use of Berber loanwords support the point. In a remarkable passage at the end of Book V, Corippus describes the occupation of the Moorish camp. Moorish women are captured or murdered, camels, cattle, sheep and asses stolen or put to the sword:

Everything perished now: the *tarua* of the Moors was nowhere to be found.<sup>46</sup>

*Tarua* is otherwise unknown in classical writing. A plausible connection has been identified with the modern Berber term *tarwa*, 'offspring/progeny', which would give the term a resonance something like the Latin *stirps* (or more loosely *gens*).<sup>47</sup> In this passage, Corippus refers to the slaughter and scattering of men, women, children and flocks, and may have deployed the local word to refer to the entire community of Moors – something like the Arabic *smalah*, as Modéran notes.<sup>48</sup> We cannot know, of course, what resonances this term might have had for the poet or his audience. It is likely that this is an example of Corippus' reality effect – an attempt to situate his audience in the strange but still plausible world of the African periphery, using authentic language that might sometimes have been heard in the streets of Carthage. Its meaning might also have been inferred from context, implying an exotic social organization in

<sup>42</sup> For example Sil Ital *Pun* XVI.258; XVII.110 (which makes Syphax a Massylian) and Prudentius, *Perist.* IV.45–6. Desanges (1962), 109–10.

<sup>43</sup> Lucan *BC* IV.681; Claudian, *Stil* I.356; Nemesianus, *Cyg.* 261 Desanges (1962), 112.

<sup>44</sup> See Desanges (1962), 112–13, who notes that the modern ethnonym *Amazigh* is probably derived from this. Compare Brogan (1975), 278.

<sup>45</sup> *Ioh* II.26–7; IV.350–5; V.35–6; VI.563–4; VIII.276–7; VIII.310–1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ioh* V.492: *omnia iam pereunt: Maurorum tarua nusquam.* <sup>47</sup> Múrcia (2006).

<sup>48</sup> Modéran (2003a), 441–3. Compare Partsch (1896), 38.



which humans and animals are bound together in a single community. But this strangeness was not limited to the Moors who fought against the empire. The same term is used to refer to the followers of the loyal Moor Ifsdaias as he rallied in support of John Troglita's forces in Book VII:

Fiery Ifsdaias came with a hundred thousand men, and his *tarua* filled the wide fields of Arsuris.<sup>49</sup>

Again, Corippus' intended meaning here is not completely clear. Was this *tarua* a mass of warriors? Armed men followed by women, children and animals? A great swathe of Africa rising in support of John and the empire? The indeterminate nature of this image may have added to its impact. The *gentes*, *Mauri*, *Maurusii* and *Massyli* of the *Iohannis* were an enormous and unsettling mass, marked by many of the traditional markers of barbarian otherness and transcending even the limits of Latin. But these *gentes* included allies among their number as well as enemies.

There have been several attempts to clarify Corippus' ethnographic language by identifying apparent oppositions within his text: according to this view, the significance of terms like *gens* or *Maurus* is best explained by what they are not. Yves Modéran argued that *cives* (citizens) and *gentes* (tribes) are consistently contrasted within the text, for example.<sup>50</sup> He suggested that this reflected Corippus' view of an essential social division within North African society of the sixth century, between those who lived in towns and accepted imperial law and those who did not.<sup>51</sup> As he and others have shown, this duality was developed in a series of other oppositions in which the Moorish *gentes* are pagan, pastoral and anarchic while the Roman citizens are Christian, agrarian (or civic) and ordered.<sup>52</sup> In this reading, it is the clash of these civilizations – and the victory of the latter – which underpin the logic of the text and exemplify its importance as a celebration of imperial rule.

While there can be little doubt that the contrast between civilization and barbarism was central to imperial rhetoric in Byzantine Africa, and doubtless was very important to many inhabitants of sixth-century Carthage, there are risks of overstating this opposition within the *Iohannis*: Chiara Tommasi Moreschini surely goes too far in regarding Corippus' ethnography as

<sup>49</sup> *Iob* VII.272–3: *uenit Ifsdaias centum cum milibus ardens, | Arsuris et latos impleuit tarua campos.*

<sup>50</sup> Modéran (1990), 396–7; Modéran (2003a), 418–20, and compare Zarini (1997), 42, 137.

<sup>51</sup> Modéran (2003a), 418–20, 443; compare Zarini (1997), 42, 137; Zarini (2005).

<sup>52</sup> See for example von Rummel (2010), 580–2.

essentially Manichaean.<sup>53</sup> Pointed juxtapositions between 'Roman' (or 'citizen') and 'Moor' (or 'tribesman') within the text are actually relatively few, and *gens/gentes* are generally used by Corippus without pejorative overtones.<sup>54</sup> Modéran identifies only four points at which *gentes* and *cives* are contrasted; significantly all come in direct addresses of imperial commanders to their troops in battle, and three are less straightforward than they appear.<sup>55</sup> The first of these is made by John son of Sisiniolus in the midst of his struggle with the rebel Stutias, and hence relates to Roman civil conflict as much as external war (although Stutias' Moorish allies do play an important role in the battle).<sup>56</sup> The second is John's address to his troops at a moment when he doubts the loyalty of his own Moorish allies, a fear which proves ill-founded: in this sense, his 'us against the world' rhetoric only relates to one particularly perilous moment.<sup>57</sup> The final example comes in Book VIII in the dying words of Putzintulus, an imperial officer whose name was not classically 'Roman' and whose identity as part of John's cosmopolitan entourage was part of Corippus' wider argument, as we shall see in Chapter 5.<sup>58</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that the loyal Moor Cusina appeals to *Romani* as well as the loyal *gentes* in a battlefield address in the same book.<sup>59</sup> This has sometimes been taken as evidence that Cusina was given command of a Roman unit (which would be noteworthy), but may also reflect the degree to which Roman and Moorish identities might be blurred, particularly when they were fighting on the same side.<sup>60</sup>

Cusina illustrates the complexity of Corippus' Moorish ethnography well. He was the most prominent of John's Moorish allies and appears throughout the *Iohannis* as a consistent supporter of the imperial cause. He is distinguished throughout by the epithet *fidus* (faithful), and the poet manipulates his account of earlier events to support this: Cusina is presented as a supporter of Solomon at Cillium and included among John's earliest allies in 546, neither of which is confirmed by our other sources.<sup>61</sup> While

<sup>53</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2002a), 169, and compare Tommasi Moreschini (2007), 181: 'Conversely, Corippus depicts the Berber tribes revolting against the Byzantines as a collective, impersonal entity (besides the two or three main characters), and is always inspired by a radical dualism between good and evil that does not admit shades or exceptions. His representation of the Berbers is extreme and he has set up, in simplistic terms, a "binary opposition" between the righteous Byzantines and their perfidious adversaries.' This is entirely typical of the scholarship on the poem.

<sup>54</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 110–12. <sup>55</sup> Modéran (2003a), 418–20. The other example is *Ioh* VI.624–5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ioh* IV.123–5. <sup>57</sup> *Ioh* IV.439–42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ioh* VIII.497–9. On Putzintulus' background, see especially Riedlberger (2010), 340–1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ioh* VIII.432–3. <sup>60</sup> PLRE III, Cutzinas. Modéran (1994). Compare also *Ioh* VII.262–71.

<sup>61</sup> *fidus*: *Ioh* IV.509–10, V.451–2, VI.468, VII.248, VII.266, VIII.272, VIII.371, VIII.459 and compare III.407–8 (*semperque fidelis* | *Cusina*), VI.268 (*semper fidissimus*), VIII.466 (*fidissimus*). His fidelity is repeatedly stressed in the speech VIII.432–46.

Procopius is explicit that Cusina was centrally implicated in Guntharith's usurpation, Corippus is silent on this for obvious reasons.<sup>62</sup> This loyalty lends the Moorish leader a certain Roman patina within the poem: he is described as 'very close to the Romans in blood and faith', and Carcasan implies that his mother was 'Roman' in a hostile speech in the final book.<sup>63</sup> Yet, if his parentage connected Cusina to the world of Rome, his appearance in the poem is unambiguously Moorish, and it was this identity which made his fidelity so important.

Amid a large crowd, the faithful Cusina followed them, leading his regiments under Massylian banners. He was Roman in spirit, and not far from being one in blood, adorned as he was with a peaceful character and a Latinate gravity. He could not be equalled in the javelin and in strength, even by Adonis, the beloved of Venus, or by the strong Achilles.<sup>64</sup>

Here, Cusina's African background is a feature of his epic heroism, not an obstacle to it.<sup>65</sup> We know from Procopius that Cusina hailed from Numidia, and Corippus implies that he may have been associated with a group called the Mastraciani – sadly the text of the poem is difficult here, and the ethnonym is not otherwise known.<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere in the poem, his troops are identified as *Mauri*, *Massylii* and *Maurusii*, and his dramatic function in the epic revolves around this identity.<sup>67</sup> Where some Moors rebelled, others fought for the empire and offered the prospect of peace. John repeatedly emphasizes the steadfastness of Cusina and Ifsidaias when faced with the fluctuating loyalty of his own troops, and his courage on the battlefield illustrates the strength that comes through imperial unity.<sup>68</sup> Equally, John's movement to save the imperilled Cusina in the battle that follows is the final and clearest manifestation of the Virgilian doctrine *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* – a motif the general explicitly invokes

<sup>62</sup> Proc. *BV*. II.25.1–2, 27.24–5; On which see Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ioh* V.451–2: *Cusina Romanis consanguinitate propinquus | atque fide; VIII.271: dum consanguineus, gentis de matre Latina.* (words of Carcasan).

<sup>64</sup> *Ioh* IV.509–14: *hos sequitur fidus, densa stipante caterua, | Cusina Massylis deducens agmina signis. | ille animo Romanus erat, nec sanguine longe, | moribus ornatus placidis, gravitate Latina. | non illum aequiperans iaculis aut viribus esset | uel Veneri dilectus Adon uel fortis Achilles.*

<sup>65</sup> We see something similar in the knowing celebration of two prominent Vandal leaders as 'a new Achilles' in Proc. *BV*. I.9.2 and in Parthemius *Resc ad Sid*: Buechner (1982), 201. On this conceit, see Merrills and Miles (2010), 99–100.

<sup>66</sup> *Ioh* III.407–8. On the *Mastraciani*, see Desanges (1992), 170; Desanges (2010), 302; Modéran (2003a), 335–6; Modéran (1990), 395.

<sup>67</sup> *Ioh* VII.264–5 (*acies Maurorum*); VIII.444 (*Maurus eques*), and compare VI.267–8 (*Masyilas . . . acies*); IV.510 (*Massylis . . . agmina signis*); VIII.472 (*Maurusia manus*).

<sup>68</sup> *Ioh* VIII.119–26 (John's speech to his troops); VIII.428–46; VIII.454–6 (steadfast fighting).

in explaining his actions.<sup>69</sup> For Corippus, it was the sparing of the subject, quite as much as the crushing of the proud, which led to the success of John's expedition. And it was Cusina's Moorishness which enabled that theme to be explored thoroughly.

### Old Names and New Names: The Epic Tradition

Corippus' representation of Moorish Africa was shaped fundamentally by the genre in which he worked. Epic poetry had always delighted in long geographical digressions in the form of lists: The catalogue of Greek ships in *Iliad* II was the great archetype of this form, in which the gathering of the Achaean forces enables a bravura survey of the Aegean and the wider world. Passages of this kind fulfilled an important narrative function, even as they allowed the poet to perform his erudition and inventiveness. Equally, they helped inscribe certain places and group names within the geographical imagination of the Mediterranean world.<sup>70</sup> In Latin epic, catalogues of North African *gentes* in particular had become commonplace. Virgil alludes to the many neighbours of Carthage in *Aeneid* IV, but the tradition was consolidated in the more systematic lists of Lucan and Silius Italicus.<sup>71</sup> Although some contemporary knowledge of North African ethnography may have inspired these accounts, over time, this developed into an established poetic corpus of African 'tribal' names. These names were increasingly abstracted from the geographical reality of that region yet retained their authority thanks to the importance of these authors' works. In the late-fourth century, Claudian flavoured his polemical *War with Gildo* with extensive reference to this poetic tradition, despite its historical inaccuracies. Half a century later, Sidonius Apollinaris did much the same thing when he presented the Vandals and their allies as the belligerents in a fourth Punic War.<sup>72</sup>

While Corippus was certainly aware of this ethnographic tradition, his deference to it was more cautious than many of the writers who had come before him. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, the longest 'tribal' catalogue in the *Iohannis* comes at the start of Book II and deviates substantially from the epic tradition in both content and

<sup>69</sup> *Ioh* VIII.458–71.

<sup>70</sup> Gassner (1972) and W. Kühlmann (1973) are essential studies of epic catalogues, and see now Reitz et al. (2019) for a thorough overview.

<sup>71</sup> Virg. *Aen.* IV. passim; Luc *BC.* IV.666–86; Sil Ital *Pun.* II.56–67, III.231–324, V.192–200, VI.672–6, IX.220–43, XII.745–52.

<sup>72</sup> Compare Claud. *I Cons Stil.* 248–63, 351–7; Sid Ap *Carm.* V. 335–49.

form: it includes almost none of the familiar figures from Virgil and the later poets.<sup>73</sup> The closest Corippus comes to a traditional survey appears at the start of Book VI, in the account of the groups who followed Carcasan into the second phase of the war in 547:

The barbarian throng gathered, and grew stronger in men and arms. Cavalry and infantry rushed to join them, and so too did those who sit on tall camels in the way that Moors do. Those who joined them were not only the Ilaguas and those who had fought in the earlier wars, but also the rough Nasamon who farms the Syrtic country, the one who lives in the lands close to the Garamantean fields, and those who drink from the pools along the banks of the fertile Nile. Who could name all of these *gentes*, or put a number on them?<sup>74</sup>

This is a remarkable mixture of the old and the new. Several of these names are familiar mainstays of the classical epic tradition and were presumably included here for that reason, rather than from a desire for historical accuracy. The *Garamantes* appear frequently in earlier epic catalogues, for example. Associated with the oasis centres of the Fezzan since the time of Herodotus, the group appear in the catalogues of Lucan, Silius Italicus, Claudian and Sidonius.<sup>75</sup> Although Justinian maintained diplomatic relations with the group, it is unlikely that they were directly involved in the events of 547–8, and it is more likely that Corippus included them here because of their strong poetic pedigree and to amplify the implied scale of Carcasan's rising.<sup>76</sup> This is certainly true of the inhabitants of the upper Nile ('those who drink from the pools along the banks of the fertile Nile'), who also feature prominently in the poetic tradition but can have had little connection to the historical circumstances described here.<sup>77</sup> Neither the *Garamantes* nor the Nile dwellers are mentioned again in the poem. Elsewhere in the *Iohannis*, Corippus refers to other familiar African peoples, but often passes over them quickly. The *Gaetuli*, for example, are only alluded to once in passing, and then as

<sup>73</sup> See below 153–164.

<sup>74</sup> *Ioh* VI.193–201. *barbara turba coit: numeris augetur et armis. | tunc equites peditesque ruunt altisque camelis | Maurorum qui more sedent. nec solus Ilaguas | aut gentes tantum, egerunt quae bella priores, | conuenere sibi, sed si quis Syrtica rura | asper arat Nasamon, si quis Garamantidos aruis | proximus arua colit, pinguis qui margine Nili | stagna bibunt, uenere uiri. quis dicere gentes | aut numerarae queat?*

<sup>75</sup> Invoked in poetry: Virg. *Aen.* IV.IV.198; VI.794; compare *Ec* VIII.44; Luc. *BC*, IV.334; IV.679; IX.512; Sil Ital. *Pun.* II.58; III.10; III.312–16; IV.445–54; V.194; VI.676; IX.222; X.304; XI.181; XII.749; XIII.479–81; XVII.634; Claudian, *I. Cons Stil* 255, 355; Sid Ap *Carm.* V.336. Mattingly (2003), 81–91; compare Modéran (2003a), 232–3, on the significance of Corippus' silence on these groups.

<sup>76</sup> Justinian's diplomatic exchanges with the group are discussed at 254–55 below.

<sup>77</sup> Nilotic inhabitants in the poetry: Sil Ital. *Pun* III.265–6, IX.224; Claudian, *I. Cons Stil* 252–4. On the peculiar status of the Nile in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, see Merrills (2017a), chapter 6.

a poetic flourish.<sup>78</sup> Other groups from the epic lexicon do not appear at all: Corippus never refers to the Autoleles, Aethiopes or Numidae, for example, in spite of their prominence in earlier catalogues.<sup>79</sup>

Corippus deploys other ethnonyms much more freely, and this is revealing. The *Nasamones* are a commonplace of classical poetic ethnography, where they are generally placed in Syrtica and the surrounding region. Following the passage just cited, they are named sixteen times in the *Iohannis*.<sup>80</sup> The *Marmaridae* do not appear in the short catalogue in Book VI, but surface repeatedly across Corippus' text: they too have a long ancestry in Latin poetic writing.<sup>81</sup> Greek writers typically located the *Marmarides* in the Western Desert of Egypt, but by the imperial period they too were most commonly located in eastern Tripolitania and Syrtica. The adjective *Syrticus/a* is used fourteen times over the course of the poem to refer both to that geographical region and to the groups who came from it: again, this was a poetic commonplace.<sup>82</sup> Finally, the *Laguatan* (variously rendered as *Ilaguas*, *Ilaguatan* and *Laguantan* in modern editions, with further variations in the MS), are not known from the poetic tradition, but occupy a very prominent role in Corippus' text.<sup>83</sup> Contemporary sources firmly locate this group in eastern Tripolitania and Syrtica.

At certain points in the *Iohannis*, the terms *Marmaridae*, *Nasamones* and *Laguatan* are used metonymically to refer to Moors in a broad sense, rather than to groups from a specific region. Unlike *Mauri*, *Maurusii* or *Mazax*, however (or indeed *gens/gentes*), these terms are never applied to Moors who were the allies of the Romans, but only ever to the antagonists of the

<sup>78</sup> *Ioh* V.431 referring to a *Gaetula*. Compare Luc., *BC* IV.676; Sil Ital. *Pun.* II.64; III.287–99; IX.79–80; XVI.176; Sid Ap *Carm.* V.335–40. *Gaetulia* as a metonym for interior Africa in Claudian, *I. Cons Stil* 258; *IV. Cons Hon.* 438; *Bell Gild.* 357. On the name, see Brogan (1975), 277–8.

<sup>79</sup> *Autololes*: Luc. *BC* IV.677; Sil Ital. *Pun.* III.306 (catalogue); VI.675 (mini-catalogue); Claudian, *I Cons Stil* 356; Sid Ap. *Carm.* V.335–40 and compare Desanges (1962), 208–11; *Numidae*: Luc. *BC* IV.677; Sil Ital. *Pun.* I.215–18, IX.242; and compare *Noma(de)s*: Sil Ital. *Pun.* V.194, VI.675, X.304, XVII.633; Sid Ap *Carm* V.336.

<sup>80</sup> *Nasamones*: Compare Ov. *Met* V.130 (*Nasamoniaci . . . agri*); Luc. *BC* IV.679 (list); IX.439–44 (Generally Syrtic); IX.458; Sil Ital. *Pun.* II.62 (list); III.320; (Catalogue); IX.221 (catalogue); XI.180 (as stand in for African barbarism); XIII.481; XVI.630; XVII.246; Claud, *Bell Gild.* 192–3; *Cons Stil* I.256, 354; Sid Ap *Carm.* V.337; IX.256. Compare Desanges (1962), 152–4; Brogan (1975), 279. On Corippus' use of the term, see especially Riedlberger (2010), 169.

<sup>81</sup> Compare Ov. *Met* V.125; Luc. *BC* IV.680; Sil Ital. *Pun.* III.300; V. 185 [apparently used as a metonym for the African forces as a whole]; IX.222; XIV.482; Sid Ap *Carm.* V.337. Compare Desanges (1962), 164–5; Riedlberger (2010), 215.

<sup>82</sup> *Ioh* V.28; V.462; V.503; VI.104; VI.191; VI.197; VI.217–18; VI.447; VI.564; VI.639; VII.289; VII.351; VIII.167; VIII.601.

<sup>83</sup> Partsch (1879), xii, on the variations.

poem, and this distinction is significant.<sup>84</sup> The proper name *Marmaridae* and its adjectival form *Marmarida/um* are generally used simply to refer to the hostile Moors in arms, and the phrase *Marmaridae . . . acies* is a commonplace.<sup>85</sup> The label *Nasamones* is used in much the same way to designate the army of Carcasan and his allies, and here there is a conspicuous shift over the course of the poem. The term never appears in the opening books of the *Iohannis*, but recurs throughout Books VI, VII and VIII.<sup>86</sup>

The long tradition of Latin poetic ethnography adds an extra complication to our reading of the *Iohannis*, but for the most part, Corippus' use of ancient ethnonyms was systematic. A small handful of names were used simply for their poetic resonance: the Garamantes, Gaetuli and Nilotic inhabitants were evocative markers of barbarian otherness, but only surface very briefly in the work. Several terms were deployed simply as literary synonyms for the Moors as a whole – *Mauri*, *Maurusii* or *Mazax* – while others were restricted to those in arms against the empire – *Nasamones*, *Marmaridae* and the adjective *Syrticus*. These terms are particularly associated with eastern Tripolitania and Syrtica, but Corippus' use of contemporary ethnonyms represents the most important feature of his account.

### New Names: The Puzzle of the *Laguatan*

Among the groups included in Carcasan's allies in 547, the *Laguatan* (also *Ilaguas*, *Ilaguatan* and *Laguantan*) stand out starkly. These variants appear a total of twenty-nine times over the course of the *Iohannis*, and this is the most common ethnonym within the poem after the generic *Mauri*/*Maurusii*.<sup>87</sup> The name is not known from any other ancient source, but the *Laguatan* have been securely identified with Procopius' *Leuathai*, who are also placed in the hinterland of Lepcis Magna at this time and have also been connected to the *Lawata*, who are variously located across eastern Libya and the Egyptian Western Desert in Arabic sources of the ninth century.<sup>88</sup> The fact that the *Leuathai* are the only Moorish group

<sup>84</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 46.

<sup>85</sup> *Ioh.* V.398, VI.565, 574, and compare VI.507, VIII.381, 429 (*agmina Marmaridarum*).

<sup>86</sup> Andres (1994), 313, lists sixteen uses of the term in Books VI–VIII.

<sup>87</sup> 'Laguatan' appears ten times in Diggle and Goodyear's *Iohannis*, *Ilaguatan* once, *Ilaguas* 18. The MS also has *Hilaguas*, *Ilasguas*, *Laguanta*, *Languantan* and *Languantan*.

<sup>88</sup> Partsch (1879), xii; Bates (1914), 67–9; Courtois (1955), 344–5; Desanges (1962), 101–2; Brogan (1975), 284–5; Zarini (1997), 163–4.



distinguished by name in the *Wars* testifies to their importance in the mid-sixth century, and they play an important role in that historian's narrative. Procopius describes the uneasy peace established in Tripolitania in the early years of the occupation, and its dramatic collapse following Sergius' murder of seventy nine envoys from the group in 543. As we have seen, Sergius' atrocity triggered a fresh escalation in the military crisis of the 540s and led ultimately to the events recounted in the *Iohannis*.<sup>89</sup> Corippus includes the Laguatan among the Moorish belligerents at Antonia Castra in 546, and they were evidently central in the renewal of hostilities thereafter. John's campaign of 547 was directed in part against them, and they had a crucial role in the second great Moorish coalition in 548.

The nature of the *Laguatan/Leuathai* and their relationship to other groups in the region has been much debated by scholars, and (as ever) the *Iohannis* has been cited in support of a variety of different interpretations. Corippus includes a number of tantalising and seemingly contradictory allusions to the political constitution of the group over the course of his work. Ierna is explicitly identified as the leader of the Ilaguas and priest of Gurzil (*ductor . . . Gurzilque sacerdos*) in the catalogue of Book II, but he seems to have been subordinate to Antalas in the order of battle at the end of Book IV (his religious function will be considered in more detail in Chapter 6).<sup>90</sup> Strikingly, after his death at Antonia Castra, Ierna is referred to as the Marmaridan king (*Marmaridum rex*) – the only use of that title in the *Iohannis*.<sup>91</sup> In the following year, Carcasan became the next leader of the group.<sup>92</sup> During his consultation with the oracle of Ammon in Book VI, Carcasan is identified as leader of the Ilaguas, but Corippus more frequently describes his coalition using the adjective *Syrticus* or the archaizing terms *Nasamones* or *Marmarides*.<sup>93</sup> Conspicuously, Carcasan is also identified as the commander of a contingent of Ifuraces during the first battle in the *Iohannis*. This group appears after the Ilaguas in the catalogue of Book II, and also seems to have fought (under multiple

<sup>89</sup> This episode is discussed fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ioh* II.109 and compare IV.632 *ille secundus erat*. Shea (1998), 129, reads *ille* as a reference to Ierna, and hence his subordination to Antalas 'Savage Ierna, their second in command was with them, as was haughty Bruten'; Ramirez Tirado (1997), 131, suggests that this refers to Bruten's subordination to Ierna: 'Yerna y el temible Bruten que le sigue.'

<sup>91</sup> *Ioh* V.520. Modéran (2003a), 438, suggests that this implies his position at the head of a confederation. Merrills (2021), 11, argues that this is another example of Corippian irony (and that Ierna achieved in death a royal title that had eluded him in life).

<sup>92</sup> *Ioh* VI.142–4 and compare VI.226.

<sup>93</sup> *Ioh* VI.166–8. For more on this prophecy, see Chapter 6. John also identifies Carcasan's coalition as Ilaguas in direct speech at VI.238–46. On other labels, compare *Ioh* VI.104, 217, 563–4 (*Syrtic*); VI.551–2, VIII.242–8 (*Nasamonian*); VI.563–4, VIII.636–6 (*Marmaridan*).



leaders) at Campi Catonis in Book VIII.<sup>94</sup> It seems plausible that Carcasan rose from a position in this group to leadership of the coalition as a whole after 547. Perhaps most confusing is Antalas' self-identification as leader of the Laguatan peoples (*Laguatan gentis . . . ductor*) in the report of the Moorish envoy Maccus in Book II.<sup>95</sup> This seems anomalous given what we know of Antalas' origins in southern Byzacium, but it will be discussed in more detail shortly.

The modern scholarly consensus is that the Laguatan or Leuathai were a coalition made up of smaller groups. This would seem to be confirmed by Procopius' reference to the many ambassadors killed in the atrocity at Lepcis Magna, as well as by Corippus' reference to the 'thousand commanders' (*mille duces*) of the Syrtic army.<sup>96</sup> Quite whether this was a formal confederation of subtribes of the type outlined in anthropological models of segmentary kinship systems, or a peculiar creation of the military crisis (and social upheaval) of the mid-sixth century is less clear.<sup>97</sup> The possible linguistic connections to the *Lawata* in the ninth-century Arabic tradition may suggest a lasting confederation, but this term is often very loosely applied and neither the *Lawata* nor the Laguatan are known in sufficient detail to draw this connection with confidence.<sup>98</sup> Equally unclear is the relationship between the Laguatan of the sixth century and the groups variously known as the Austuriani (variously *Austoriani*, *Ausoriani*, *Auxouriano*, *Ausouriano*), who are described as a perennial threat to eastern Tripolitania and southern Cyrenaica in fourth- and fifth-century accounts, and who are assumed to have originated in Syrtica and the surrounding regions.<sup>99</sup> Corippus refers to the Austur alongside the Ilaguas in the catalogue of Book II,

<sup>94</sup> *Ioh* IV.639 (Carcasan commands them at Antonia Castra); II.113–14 (in the catalogue); VIII.490 (multiple *duces*) and compare VIII.648.

<sup>95</sup> *Ioh* I.467. <sup>96</sup> *Ioh* IV.644.

<sup>97</sup> The classic formulation of segmentary lineage in North African anthropology is Gellner (1969), 35–69. On challenges to this paradigm, compare Kuper (1982) and Roberts (2014), 1–26 (on modern Kabylia); Sneath (2007) (on Mongolian steppe groups). Gellner's segmentary model is applied to the Laguatan by Mattingly (1983) and Mattingly (1999), 32–7, partly through the strained solution of identifying Antalas' *Frexes* as a subtribe of the confederation. Compare also Fentress (2006). Compare Modéran (2003a) 209–48, 289–310 and (2008) on the view that the Laguatan were a powerful group ('supertribu' at 434) based in Augila, who were able to gather their neighbours in an exceptional alliance. And Felici et al. (2006), 615–18, says that they were a dominant nomadic group who filled the political power vacuum in Tripolitania after the Vandal period through alliance, enslavement, (temporary) assimilation and conflict, a similar position to that articulated in Waldherr (2006).

<sup>98</sup> Modéran (2003a), 186–96, 421–2.

<sup>99</sup> Modéran (2003a), 165, compiles the references. Compare also Desanges (1962), 82; Felici et al. (2006), 609–15.

which suggests that both identities remained active at the time of his composition, but again this is a difficult passage in its own right and perhaps reflects Carthaginian chauvinisms as much as the ethnographic reality on the ground.<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere, the poet also uses both terms to stand for the Syrtic Moors more widely.<sup>101</sup>

It is clear that the novel appearance of the Austuriani (and later Laguatan) in our textual sources reflected a genuine social transformation on the ground. Archaeological surveys across inland Tripolitania have revealed a dramatic shift in occupation patterns from the later third century, which became particularly pronounced in the fourth and fifth.<sup>102</sup> There, a landscape previously defined by open settlements in the earlier imperial period was increasingly marked by fewer settlements, many of which were fortified towers, farmhouses and granaries of different types (generally referred to by the Arabic term *gasr/gsur*).<sup>103</sup> Shifts of this kind were still more pronounced in Syrtica, where open farms had disappeared almost entirely by the fourth century.<sup>104</sup> These changes coincided with textual accounts of new tensions between the inhabitants of the countryside and those living in the coastal cities, as well as the emergence of new ethnonyms, but the social transformations that lay behind them remain obscure. It was once argued that the Austuriani or Laguatan represented a substantial migration of new peoples from the east (or south); this has now largely been rejected, although some population displacement over this long period is certainly possible.<sup>105</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that Corippus clearly did not regard the Laguatan as a group who had recently arrived in the region: the poet twice refers to boasts of the group's leaders that they had resisted Roman control since at least the time of Maximian at the end of the third century.<sup>106</sup> Maximian's campaigns are poorly commemorated in the imperial sources, and it is possible that this

<sup>100</sup> Modéran (2003a), 124–5, 292–3, argues that they were separate groups (partly on the strength of the distinction between the Ilaguas and the Austur in *Ioh* II.86–91.).

<sup>101</sup> *Ioh* II.87–91, II.209–10 V.171–2. On metonymic use, compare *Ioh* VII.283 and the foregoing discussion.

<sup>102</sup> Sheldrick (2022) provides an excellent recent overview. Compare also Felici et al. (2006), 632–52, 663–73 (on Tripolitania) and Mackensen (2012).

<sup>103</sup> Felici et al. (2006), 645–50; Mattingly, Sterry and Leitch (2013) for a recent assessment.

<sup>104</sup> Sheldrick (2022), 168–9.

<sup>105</sup> Courtois (1955), 10–24; Brogan (1975), 282–4; Camps (1980), 124–8 (migration from the east) and compare Mattingly (1983) on the mixture of eastern incomers with local populations. Modéran (2003a), 121–207, refutes this exhaustively, with a recapitulation of the same points in Modéran (2008b). Compare now Wilson and Fentress (2016), especially 58–9, for the argument that there was substantial migration from the Sahara from the fifth century.

<sup>106</sup> *Ioh* IV.374, V.178–80; VII.530; Modéran (2003a), 155.

was a tradition the Laguatan themselves articulated during their interactions with imperial representatives, which was then preserved in the campaign records of the Byzantine officers, and reproduced in Corippus' epic.<sup>107</sup> If this was the case, they evidently saw themselves as long-standing neighbours of the empire.

The survey evidence is clear that agricultural exploitation declined across Tripolitania and Syrtica from the early fourth century and mobile pastoralism became much more common. This need not be read as a simple rise to dominance of nomadic groups at the cost of farmers who cowered behind their newly fortified walls. In fact, mixed subsistence strategies had always been widespread across Roman Africa, particularly in agriculturally marginal regions, and some of the inhabitants of the *gsur* may themselves have come from communities of pastoralists, or from groups who combined agriculture with transhumance but found the balance of their activities changing.<sup>108</sup> The Roman frontier system had been established to manage the movements of population groups in and out of the cultivated zone in Africa, not least because the seasonal migration of animals and workers was essential to the continued operation of farms throughout the region.<sup>109</sup> Regional Roman commanders had always depended on the complicity of local elites for the effective operation of this process, and the nature of these relations is likely to have changed as new figures rose to prominence across this region. In this context, it is worth remembering that the *Leuathai* first appear in Procopius' account as the recipients of imperial honours, with the expectation that they might help maintain the peace around Lepcis. The fact that their first discussions with Sergius in 543 related to complaints about the Roman treatment of the tribes' farmland is also a reminder that they came from mixed communities and that obligations ran in both directions.<sup>110</sup> That they did support the empire at times is also clear: Corippus implies that the Ifuraces were among the troops brought by Dux Pelagius to fight with Solomon in 544, and his allusions to the ongoing relationship between the Astrices and the empire suggests something similar.<sup>111</sup> Relations were often

<sup>107</sup> The expedition is alluded to in *Pan Lat* VII.8.6; VIII.5.2; IX.21.2, but is not mentioned in any other historical account. Compare Nixon and Rodgers (1994), 174–5, n. 83.

<sup>108</sup> Scheele (2017) emphasizes the interdependence of sedentaries and nomads in the Saharan oases in this period, to the extent that it is 'analytically fallacious to separate them' (p. 57).

<sup>109</sup> See especially Whittaker (1978) and the wider study Whittaker (1994). Pol Troussset's work on the Tripolitanian frontier is essential, especially Troussset (1980), Troussset (1986), Troussset (1997) and Troussset (2011). See also Mattingly (1995), 14–6, 37–8. Shaw (2013) is a brilliant study of mobility within African agriculture (among many other things).

<sup>110</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.5 and see the discussion of this episode in Chapter 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Iob* III.410–15, and see Chapter 3. The Mecaes were also among this contingent.

frosty and could break out into extended hostility, as they did in the 540s, but there was never an absolute division between the desert and the sown in the society or politics of the frontier region.

Historical accounts (and modern historical atlases) tend to place the Leuathai or Laguatan firmly in the frontier regions of Tripolitania and Syrtica, or around the oasis centres of Augila or Jufra, but this can only be partially correct: significant groups of people were mobile throughout the year, often over quite large distances.<sup>112</sup> During the summer grazing season especially, parts of these population must have ranged very widely: twentieth-century studies of seasonal pastoralism suggest that transhumance routes could stretch into central or northern Tunisia and during this process, the groups could break up and reconstitute multiple times; there is every reason to assume that ancient populations were similarly mobile.<sup>113</sup> In effect, what created the crisis of the 540s was not simply the presence of pastoralist groups from Tripolitania or Syrtica in Byzacium and Zeugitania – transhumants had been a more or less constant (if invisible) aspect of economic life across the region for centuries, if not always from quite so far afield – but rather the number of these incomers, and the fact that they were able to range unchecked. Exploitation of these groups' strength and mobility by power brokers like Stotzas or Antalas within the provinces magnified this threat enormously, but even at the height of the crisis they regularly returned to their winter grazing pastures each year, as Yves Modéran acutely noted.<sup>114</sup>

Modéran went on to argue that contemporary sources well recognized the distinction between the 'internal' Moors (like Cusina and Antalas), who rose to prominence beneath the imperial aegis, and the 'external' Moors (like the Laguatan), who represented a different sort of threat.<sup>115</sup> He argued that John's strategy was largely to pacify the former and expel the latter beyond the frontiers.<sup>116</sup> The ethnographic language of the *Iohannis* supports this interpretation. The fact that the classicizing terms

<sup>112</sup> Brogan (1975), 282, and Fentress and Wilson (2016), 58, suggest the Jufra group, Modéran (2003a), 212–13 Augila. On the significance of this site, see Chapter 6.

<sup>113</sup> The classic studies are Clarke (1955) and Despois (1958), especially 217–45. The implications for the classical world are explored in Lassère (1977), 348–63, and Whittaker (1978). Merrills (2018), 361–9, discusses the late antique significance, particularly in Byzacium.

<sup>114</sup> Modéran (2003a), 620–1.

<sup>115</sup> Modéran (2003a), 63–5, and compare Riedlberger (2010), 47–54. Note the emphasis on these apparent distinctions at *Ioh* II.342–51; IV.374–5 and IV.637–40, as well as Proc. *BV* II.21.17–18. This point underpins much of Modéran (2003a), a long and immensely complex study.

<sup>116</sup> This underpins the vast study of Modéran (2003a), especially 251–78, and see also Modéran (2003d) which provides a shorter overview. Desanges (2010) provides a thoughtful summary.

*Nasamones*, *Marmaridae* and *Syrcticus/a* are only applied to groups in revolt is taken as an indication of the poet's awareness of the broad geographical fault lines within the African populations and that the heartland of the Moorish coalition lay in the south. *Laguatan* and its variants are used in a comparable way, either to refer to these belligerent southern Moors in general or to a specific subset of them. The concentration of 'Syrctic' labels in the latter part of the poem – as we have seen the *Nasamones*, *Marmaridae* and others all cluster in Books VI–VIII – may also reflect the changing emphasis of the latter part of John's campaigns and of differences between the hostile forces assembled at Antonia Castra in 546 and Campi Catonis in 548.<sup>117</sup>

Modéran's is the most persuasive analysis of the human reality behind the Moorish wars of the 540s, and his model of imperial strategy is also compelling, but certain passages within the *Iohannis* fit poorly within this, and are better read on their own terms rather than forced into preconceived models. The clearest example is the striking way in which Antalas is described by his envoy Maccus in Book I:

The noble leader of the hard Laguatan people (*Laguatan gentis acerbae ductor magnanimus*), the hero Antalas, son of Guenfan, commands us to tell you this: You, then John, whom the Massylian troops knew in the time of Solomon the unjust . . . You dare to attack unconquered *gentes*? Do you not know of the courage in battle of the Ilaguas, whose eternal fame is so celebrated? Whose ancestors Maximian, the emperor who held Roman power over the world, had already encountered in arms:<sup>118</sup>

Antalas originated among the Frexes of south-western Byzacium, several hundred miles to the west of the likely home territories of the Laguatan, yet in Book IV, Antalas again refers to *noster Ilaguas*.<sup>119</sup> These claims do not fit any of the ethnographic definitions of the Laguatan proposed by modern scholars and have consequently been dismissed.<sup>120</sup> Modéran was content to explain this as a literary conceit on Corippus' part – as a means of accentuating Antalas' barbaric 'otherness' and his exclusion from the

<sup>117</sup> Modéran (2003a), 74–7.

<sup>118</sup> *Ioh* I.467–71, 477–82: '*Laguatan gentis acerbae | ductor magnanimus tibi nos Guenfeius heros | Antalas haec ferre iubet. tu nempe, Iohannes, | quem nouit Massyla manus Solomonis iniqui | tempore . . . | tu gentibus audes | inuictis inferre manum? non quantus Ilaguas | notus Marte tibi, quem tantum fama perennis | prisca canit? cuius iam Maximianus in armis | antiquos persensit auos, Romana per orbem | sceptrum tenens Latii princeps.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ioh* IV.373–5. See Chapter 3.

<sup>120</sup> Compare Courtois (1955), 345; Modéran (2008b), 4319, describes this as 'évidemment absurde'. Mattingly (1983), 98–9, suggests that the Frexes may have originated in the oases around Gafsa (partly on the strength of this passage).

civilized world – and suggests that in these passages, the term had a semantic range similar to *Maurus* elsewhere in the epic.<sup>121</sup> Although this is a reasonable solution, not least because of the inconsistency of Corippus' ethnography across the poem, the passage may deserve further scrutiny.

Ultimately, Corippus is our only source on the ethnonym 'Laguatan', and he is one of the very few sources on the nature of Moorish identity in the changing world of the 540s. While it is tempting to explain away aspects of his account which do not fit our own presuppositions, either through his literary medium or his imperial chauvinisms, he was at least contemporary to the events he described and wrote for an audience who were themselves familiar with that world. In the passages relating to Antalas' 'Laguatan' identity, moreover, Corippus was directly reporting the words of the barbarian leader. The speech may well have been an invention of the poet, of course, but could equally have reproduced certain elements of Antalas' communications with John. If so, Antalas may well have articulated forms of social identity which are radically different from those traditionally associated with late antique North Africa. Recent work on the shifting dynamics of kinship affiliation in Anishinaabewaki in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has highlighted the degree to which dynamic group identities could be shaped and recalibrated during seasonal hunting trips, at moments of diplomatic interaction or as a result of wider political change; no less significantly it has shown how these can be traced even through the contemporary European texts that describe them.<sup>122</sup> Other work on the entanglement of sedentary and pastoral practices in Greater Mesopotamia during the Bronze Age has also underscored the permeability of such connections, especially over long distances and extended periods.<sup>123</sup> In each of these cases, social and political bonds between even widely separated groups were commonly expressed through the language of genealogical links: the assertion of shared identities was one way of making sense of a politically febrile world. While it would certainly be overly simplistic to import these models to the study of Laguatan society in the sixth century, they do at least raise the possibility that our sometimes rigid models of group identity do not encompass all social possibilities: Antalas may well have regarded himself as Laguatan once other affiliations

<sup>121</sup> Modéran (2003a), 306–8. Modéran (2008b), 4319.

<sup>122</sup> See especially Witgen (2012) and the recent study of Hämäläinen (2018). White (1991) remains invaluable. The fictional exploration of comparable identities in the eastern Great Lakes region of the late eighteenth century in Wu Ming (2009) brings these issues vividly to life.

<sup>123</sup> Porter (2012).

(including, perhaps, ‘Roman’ identity) became less accessible to him. Given the widespread seasonal movement across the region, from Antalas’ mountains as well as the Syrtic desert, power brokers like him may well have used a new vocabulary of shared identity to articulate their social and political connections, however ‘absurd’ this may seem to us. It is by no means impossible that a leader of the Byzacenian ‘Frexes’ could position himself among the Laguatan leaders in the peculiar circumstances of the 540s, or that the *Iohannis* provides meaningful evidence for this.<sup>124</sup>

If we regard Corippus in the first instance as a poet whose principal concern was to narrate recent – and probably quite well-remembered – events for an African audience, the essential outlines of his ethnographic language are clear enough, even if the details are frequently very fuzzy indeed. In the broadest possible terms, Corippus represents the landscape of southern Byzacium, western Tripolitania and the regions beyond as a complex and contested borderland. All of the inhabitants of this region are caught up in the bloody business of war, and are some senses complicit in it, whether as hostile rebels, loyal allies or something in between. Specific ethnonyms variously add detail, lend his account a verisimilitude and contribute an element of epic glamour where they recalled the great catalogues of the past. Corippus was clearly aware of a distinction between the inhabitants who lived around and beyond the frontier in Tripolitania and those closer to the heart of imperial Africa, but these are scarcely essential oppositions within his work, and he was perfectly content to confuse these boundaries when it suited him. It is possible that this was also true of the groups themselves. Ultimately, while John’s strategy may have depended upon the essential differences between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ Moors, between groups who could be brought within the aegis and those who could not, the same was not true of Corippus’ poem. Indeed, it was the mutability of these boundaries – of what it meant to be loyal, to be part of the *imperium Romanum* – that established the context in which the epic plot was actually played out. Corippus makes a frustrating ethnographer for modern historians precisely because the categories which mattered to him were not those which seem important to us. This is particularly true in the case of the longest ethnographic section of the poem – the so-called catalogue of tribes in Book II.

<sup>124</sup> Merrills (2018) explores certain aspects of Antalas’ own possible origins in a mixed society, and the implications for his expansive networks of influence.



## A Triumphant Catalogue of Tribes

The multiple influences which shaped Corippus' view of the Moors – and the implications behind his account – are revealed in a rather different way in the fullest and best studied of his ethnographic passages. The catalogue of tribes which occupies a little more than 120 lines at the start of *Iohannis* II has been central to much scholarship on the epic, and of early medieval Moorish society more broadly, but occupies a rather anomalous position within the poem.<sup>125</sup> The passage is clearly modelled on the catalogue of Italian tribes in *Aeneid* VII, and it opens with an appeal to Justinian and the muses, which is modelled on the Virgilian invocation.<sup>126</sup> Within the narrative, the list provides a first order of battle for the conflict narrated in Book V (a second, truncated list of Moorish leaders is added at the end of Book IV).<sup>127</sup> As we have seen, catalogues of this kind were common in Latin epic and many writers after Virgil included passages on African *gentes* specifically, but Corippus deviates substantially from this tradition in the details of his account.<sup>128</sup> Only one of the thirty-four or thirty-five peoples included in this list appears in earlier epic catalogues, and the majority of ethnonyms and toponyms are entirely original to the poem.<sup>129</sup> As a result, this passage provides an invaluable ethnographic source for studies of late antique Africa and has seen extensive scholarly investigation for more than a century. But the function of the catalogue within the *Iohannis*, the relationship of Corippus' presentation of the Moors here to his ethnography elsewhere and the light this sheds on contemporary understanding of the frontier zone demand further investigation.

<sup>125</sup> *Ioh* II.28–161. The centrality of this passage to modern work on the Moors is outlined in Merrills (2019). And compare Wiemer (2022), 288: '[The *Iohannis*] provides a long catalogue of tribal names from which every modern ethnography of sixth-century North Africa must start.'

<sup>126</sup> Virg. *Aen* VII.641–817. Invocations: *Ioh* II.23–7; compare Virg. *Aen* VII.641–6. Blänsdorf (1975), 538; Zarini (1997), 144; Modéran (2003a), 47–50. Tommasi Moreschini (2001b), 265–7, further notes that the introduction of Antalas in *Ioh* III.78 echoes that of Mezentius in *Aen* VIII.484, extending the parallel between these figures.

<sup>127</sup> *Ioh* IV.619–44. Note that this is probably actually the start of Book V.

<sup>128</sup> For scholarship on classical epic catalogues, see note 71. Bexley (2013) and Reitz (2013) are illuminating treatments of catalogues in Flavian narratives which have informed my thinking significantly.

<sup>129</sup> The *Barcaeii* at *Ioh* II.123–37 are the partial exception given their presence in Virg. *Aen* IV.42–3, but they have an unusual position in Corippus' list and do not appear elsewhere in the epic tradition. The *Marmaridas gentes* are mentioned at *Ioh* II.138, but they are not themselves part of the catalogue.



Analysis must start with a systematic overview of the passage. Although this is conventionally referred to as the ‘catalogue of tribes’, and the names of individual *gentes* have been the focus of much of the discussion, this is not quite the form the text takes. Here, a summary list may be helpful:

1. Antalas, who is followed by the Frexes.<sup>130</sup> Antalas is a major figure within the *Iohannis*, and his role in the origin of the war is briefly outlined. The Frexes reappear four times over the course of the *Iohannis*, generally alongside the Naffur and the Ilaguas.<sup>131</sup> They are generally assumed to have been the ‘humble people’ (*humilis gens*) from which Antalas came, although this is not explicitly stated.<sup>132</sup> Most commentators have located the group in the mountainous regions of southern Byzacium, on the strength of the historical narrative of Procopius and Corippus.<sup>133</sup>
2. Sidifan, followed by unnamed horsemen.<sup>134</sup> Sidifan appears twice more in the *Iohannis*.<sup>135</sup>
3. Sinusdisae. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>136</sup>
4. Silvaecae. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>137</sup>
5. Naffur.<sup>138</sup> The Naffur reappear four times in the *Iohannis*, generally alongside the Frexes and the Ilaguas. They twice are ascribed the epithet *anhelus* (‘panting’/‘thirsty’), but this is not used in the catalogue.<sup>139</sup>
6. Silcadinet. Corippus specifies they came from a region with tall forests. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>140</sup>
7. Unnamed inhabitants of *Gurubi montana*. The region is not otherwise mentioned in the poem. Julius Honorius mentions a group called the Curbissenses and the mons Gurbessa in his fourth-century *Cosmographia*.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>130</sup> *Iob* II.28–46.

<sup>131</sup> *Iob*. II.184–5. They are listed alongside the Naffur and Ilaguas specifically in III.186–8; VII.383–4; VIII.648.

<sup>132</sup> *Iob* III.153.

<sup>133</sup> Partsch (1879), ix; Courtois (1955), 346; Desanges (1962), 90–1; Desanges (1998b); von Rummel (2010), 577–80.

<sup>134</sup> *Iob* II.47–50. <sup>135</sup> *Iob* IV.637; V.270. <sup>136</sup> *Iob* II.51. Zarini (1997), 152.

<sup>137</sup> *Iob* II.52. Zarini (1997), 153. <sup>138</sup> *Iob* II.52.

<sup>139</sup> *Iob* III.89–90; VII.384. Note, however, the echo of *Iob* II.52 *saeuis Naffur in armis* at IV.48: *densis Naffur in armis*. Compare also VIII.648.

<sup>140</sup> *Iob* II.53–5. Zarini (1997), 153.

<sup>141</sup> *Iob* II.56. Desanges (1962), 87–8; Jul Hon. 42 (*mons Gerbessa*), 48 (*Curbissenses gens*).

8. Unnamed inhabitants of the *Mercurios colles* ('Hills of Mercury'). The region is not otherwise mentioned in the poem.<sup>142</sup>
9. Unnamed inhabitants from Ifera. Led by Autiliten, son of an unnamed father.<sup>143</sup> Ifera is not otherwise mentioned in the poem. Autiliten is identified as a leader in both of the principal battles of the poem.<sup>144</sup>
10. Silvaian (a population group). Associated with the Macares. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>145</sup>
11. Macares. Associated with the Silvaian.<sup>146</sup> Both groups are identified as nomads, but are also said to live in *mapalia* (huts) on mountains and in forests. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>147</sup>
12. Silzactae. The River Vadara flows between them and the Caunes. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>148</sup>
13. Caunes. They do not appear again in the poem. They may be identified with the *Kaunoi* mentioned by Ptolemy.<sup>149</sup>
14. Unnamed inhabitants from near Mount Agalumnus.<sup>150</sup> The location does not appear again in the poem.
15. Allusion to unnamed groups associated with Mount Macubius (apparently nearby).<sup>151</sup> The location does not appear again in the poem.
16. Unnamed inhabitants of the region around Sascar (or a group called the Sascar). Whether Sascar is an ethnonym or a toponym is not clear, but it does not appear again in the poem.<sup>152</sup>
17. Astrices.<sup>153</sup> The Astrices reappear in Book VI, where ambassadors of the group subordinate themselves to John during his campaign in Tripolitania. In his narrative voice, Corippus explicitly states that they have never been at war with the Romans, which would seem to be contradicted by their presence here.<sup>154</sup> There, Corippus identifies

<sup>142</sup> *Iob* II.57.    <sup>143</sup> *Iob* II.57–61.

<sup>144</sup> *Iob* IV.643; VII.254–75; compare Zarini (1997), 154–5; Modéran (2003a), 67–70; Riedlberger (2010), 266.

<sup>145</sup> *Iob* II.62. Zarini (1997), 153.    <sup>146</sup> *Iob* II.62–4.

<sup>147</sup> Desanges (1962), 105; Zarini (1997), 157.

<sup>148</sup> *Iob* II.66. Desanges (1962), 259; Zarini (1997), 157.

<sup>149</sup> *Iob* II.66–8. Desanges (1962), 255; Zarini (1997), 157. At 259, Desanges states that the identification with the *Kauni* of Ptolemy IV.1.5 is implausible

<sup>150</sup> *Iob* II.69–73.    <sup>151</sup> *Iob* II.72.    <sup>152</sup> *Iob* II.74. Zarini (1997), 159.    <sup>153</sup> *Iob* II.75.

<sup>154</sup> *Iob* VI.391–446; VI.451–4; VI.462–4.

- them with the Urceliani.<sup>155</sup> They are generally identified with Ptolemy's *Astakoures*.<sup>156</sup>
18. Anacutas. They do not appear again in the poem and are not known from any other source.<sup>157</sup>
  19. Celianus. These are perhaps the Urceliani who are associated with the Astrices later in the poem. A group with a similar name appears in Vegetius' fourth-century military treatise.<sup>158</sup>
  20. Imaclas.<sup>159</sup> This is a variant of the ethnonym Mecales. Liberatus identifies them as allies of the *Dux Tripolitanae* Pelagius in 544.<sup>160</sup> They are also known from Herodotus and Ptolemy.<sup>161</sup>
  21. Unnamed inhabitants from Zersilis and Gallica.<sup>162</sup> They may be identified with Zerquilis later in the catalogue, but this is not certain.<sup>163</sup> Corippus locates the defeat of John Troglita in 547 among the 'sad hills and glowering fields of Gallica'.<sup>164</sup>
  22. Unnamed inhabitants from Tillibaris and the Talalatean fields. These are probably to be identified with the *limites Talalatensis* and *Tillibarensis* listed among the sector commands of the *Dux Tripolitanae* in the early fifth-century *Notitia Dignitatum*. Neither region appears again in the poem.<sup>165</sup>
  23. Ilaguas.<sup>166</sup> A variant of Laguatan. Corippus states that they were summoned 'from the farthest regions of Libya'. The Ilaguas have a prominent role throughout the *Iohannis*.
  24. Austur.<sup>167</sup> They are closely associated with Ilaguas in Corippus' account. Ierna is their leader, and is also identified as the priest of Gurzil. He is identified in death as the *Rex Marmaridum*. The ethnonym Austur is used metonymically throughout the *Iohannis* to refer to hostile Moors.<sup>168</sup> They have been identified with the Austuriani (variously spelled) who threatened the coastal cities of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>169</sup>
  25. Ifuraces.<sup>170</sup> Liberatus states that the Ifuraces allied with Solomon in 544, but implies that they betrayed him. They are included among

<sup>155</sup> *Iob* VI.387–91. <sup>156</sup> Desanges (1962), 80–1; Zarini (1997), 160; Ptol. *Geog.* IV.3.6

<sup>157</sup> *Iob* II.75. Desanges (1962), 77; Zarini (1997), 160.

<sup>158</sup> *Iob* II.75. Zarini (1997), 160; *Iob* VI.387–91. Compare Veg. *De Mil.* III.23 *Ursiliani*.

<sup>159</sup> *Iob* II.75. <sup>160</sup> *Iob* III.410; compare Partsch (1896), 24; Zarini (1997), 160.

<sup>161</sup> Zarini (1997), 160. <sup>162</sup> *Iob* II.76–7. <sup>163</sup> Zarini (1997), 160; *Iob* II.145.

<sup>164</sup> *Iob* VI.485–6: *collesque malignos | tristis et infaustos monstrabat Gallica campos*. See further Chapter 5.

<sup>165</sup> *Iob* II.78–84; Not Dig. Occ. XXXI.18, 21; Zarini (1997), 160–1. <sup>166</sup> *Iob* II.85–8.

<sup>167</sup> *Iob* II.89–112. <sup>168</sup> *Iob* II.209–10; II.345; V.170–80; VII.281–7. <sup>169</sup> See above 148.

<sup>170</sup> *Iob* II.113–15.

- the hostile Moors in both of the major battles of the *Iohannis*.<sup>171</sup> They are not otherwise known from the classical texts.<sup>172</sup>
26. Muctinian *manus*.<sup>173</sup> Corippus states that they came from the desert of Tripolis. They are mentioned briefly alongside the Ilaguas in the account of the skirmish that follows the catalogue, but do not appear again in the poem.<sup>174</sup> They may be associated with Ptolemy's *Moukhthousii*, although this is not certain.<sup>175</sup>
  27. Unnamed group from Gadabis. This place is not mentioned again in the *Iohannis* but was certainly located near Lepcis Magna.<sup>176</sup>
  28. Unnamed group from Digdiga. This place is not mentioned again in the *Iohannis* but it is implied that it is located near Gadabis and Lepcis Magna.<sup>177</sup>
  29. Unnamed *populus*. Corippus states that they use 'Velanidean boats' and fish in the lakes. They do not feature again in the poem.<sup>178</sup>
  30. Barcaeï. Corippus describes their weapons and dress in considerable detail.<sup>179</sup> Virgil lists the Barcaeï among the Carthaginians' African neighbours in *Aeneid*, and were associated with Cyrenaica in classical writing, and of course to a dominant family in Punic politics.<sup>180</sup> Corippus uses the term once as a metonym for the Moors in Book IV.<sup>181</sup>

At this point, Corippus summarizes all of the groups listed so far as *Marmarides gentes*. This evidently does not refer to a distinct group.

31. *Innumerae gentes* from Gemini Petra and Zerquilis. These groups follow an unnamed *dux* from 'the other parts'.<sup>182</sup> Neither place is mentioned again in the *Iohannis*, but they have been plausibly identified with Geminianou Petra and Zerquilis, which Procopius identifies as key landmarks in the Aurès campaign of Solomon in 539.<sup>183</sup>
32. Unnamed inhabitants of the Navusum mountains. These mountains do not appear again in the *Iohannis* and their identification is not certain.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>171</sup> *Iob* III.412 (*Ifuraces fictos*); IV.641; VIII.490; VIII.648.

<sup>172</sup> Desanges (1962), 99; Zarini (1997), 171. <sup>173</sup> *Iob* II.116–17.

<sup>174</sup> *Iob* II.210: as *Mutuniana manus*.

<sup>175</sup> Desanges (1962), 116–17; Zarini (1997), 172; Ptol. *Geog.* IV.3.6.

<sup>176</sup> *Iob* II.117–18. Desanges (1962), 91, and compare Proc. *Buildings*. VI.4.12.

<sup>177</sup> *Iob* II.119. Zarini (1997), 173.

<sup>178</sup> *Iob* II.120–2. Partsch (1896), 28; Diggle and Goodyear (1970), 31; Zarini (1997), 173–4.

<sup>179</sup> *Iob* II.123–37. <sup>180</sup> Virg. *Aen.* IV.42–3; compare Desanges (1962), 150; Zarini (1997), 174.

<sup>181</sup> *Iob* IV.506 (*Barcaeï sanguinis*). <sup>182</sup> *Iob* II.144–8.

<sup>183</sup> Zarini (1997), 179; Compare Proc. *BV* II.19.19–28.

<sup>184</sup> *Iob* II.146–7. Zarini (1997), 179–80, discusses previous identifications, including a possible link to the Djebel Nafusa.

33. Unnamed inhabitants of 'abominable Arzugis'.<sup>185</sup> Corippus specifically alludes to traditional naming of this region, and groups called the Arzuges appear in several late antique historical sources.<sup>186</sup> They are normally located around the Chott El Djerid. They do not appear again in the *Iohannis*.
34. Unnamed group of cavalry from Aurasitania.<sup>187</sup> This is certainly the Aurès massif in southern Numidia. It is not named again in the *Iohannis*.

This list differs in several conspicuous ways from conventional epic catalogues in both content and form. As we have seen, earlier poets drew upon a limited pool of ethnonyms in constructing their own lists. While Corippus was certainly familiar with this tradition and deploys it elsewhere in the *Iohannis*, he eschews it almost entirely within the catalogue of Book II. Of the peoples he lists, only the Barcaeii are known from the classical poetic tradition, and then only from *Aeneid* IV: they do not appear in Lucan or the later poets.<sup>188</sup> The Marmarides are mentioned only in summary, and like the Barcaeii they sit somewhat outside the regular structure of the list. Corippus alludes to the ancient naming of the lands of the Arzuges, which indicates a connection to the written tradition, at least from late antiquity, which is when this group first appears in the sources. His references to them and to the Frexes, Austur, Ifuraces, Astrices and Laguatan may have been familiar to some of his audience. Similarly, his reference to certain place names may have evoked specific associations in the minds of his listeners, but the bulk of his catalogue consists of ethnonyms and toponyms which are both unique to the poem and to the catalogue: they appear here and nowhere else in the epic. There is every reason to think, therefore, that Corippus drew upon recent sources of information in compiling this catalogue, rather than simply deferring to literary tradition, but also that the catalogue sits somewhat apart from the main body of his narrative.

The structure of Corippus' list is also unusual. Most poetic catalogues of this kind are organized systematically: typically, a group is named, their leader and their point of origin are identified and distinguishing elements are added. While the order in which this is presented can vary for the sake of literary interest, details themselves are fairly consistent. This is the form followed in Virgil's catalogue, as well as in the lists of African groups

<sup>185</sup> *Iob* II.147–8.    <sup>186</sup> Desanges (1989); Modéran (2003a), 364–74.    <sup>187</sup> *Iob* II.149–55.

<sup>188</sup> *Barcaeii* is also used as a patronymic for Hannibal in Sil Ital, *Pun.* X.354.

compiled by his successors. Corippus' list seems haphazard by comparison. In total, only eighteen of his thirty-four groups are specifically named. Of these, only two – the Frexes and the Austur/Ilaguas – also have named leaders (Antalas and Ierna respectively). Two other leaders are named, but their followers are not (Sidifan's are anonymous cavalrymen, Autiliten's are simply said to come from Ifera), and a third unnamed leader is associated with *innumerae gentes* from Gemini Petra and Zerquilis. Fifteen or sixteen other *gentes* and *manus* are left anonymous and are distinguished only by their place of origin or by local landmarks, which are variously hills and mountains, rivers, regions and towns. Only three of the groups named here have a significant role in the remainder of the *Iohannis* (the Ilaguas/Laguatan, Austur and Astrices). Three more are mentioned briefly (the Frexes, Naffur and Ifuraces), and two only in passing (Muctini and Barcaei).<sup>189</sup> The remainder make no further appearance. This is not unusual in the epic tradition, but highlights the distinction between the ethnography of this part of the poem and the remainder of the *Iohannis*.

Modern studies of the catalogue have always started from the assumption that there is a coherent order within it and spent most of their time trying to work out what this might be. This is made substantially more difficult by the fact that we know very little about most of the groups within the list, and that the catalogue is strangely structured. As a result, much of this discussion is speculative. It is clear enough that the catalogue consists of three uneven parts. These are separated by digressions at II.85 (where the narrator describes the summoning of peoples 'from the farthest reaches of Africa' before discussing the Ilaguas and Austur at some length), and II.138 (which identifies the preceding groups as *Marmaridas gentes*, then describes the rising of another leader from 'other parts'). Precisely what each of these sections describes, however, and the internal structure within them is not clear. Procopius and Corippus place the Frexes in the southern part of Byzacium. The Ilaguas and Austur can be placed with some confidence in the region around Lepcis Magna, and Corippus specifies that the Muctinian *manus*, and presumably the unnamed inhabitants of Tillibaris and the Talalatean lands, came from the same region. The Barcaei may be associated with Cyrenaica, although the presence of this group in the poetic tradition urges caution. Gemini Petra and Zerquilis may be identified with fortifications in the Aurès which Procopius describes in the campaigns of Solomon in 539, and other historical evidence

<sup>189</sup> *Iob.* II.184, III.187, VII.384, VIII.648 (*Frexes*); III.189–90, IV.48, VII.384, VIII.648 (*Naffur*), III.412, IV.641, VIII.490, VIII.648 (*Ifuraces*); II.210 (*Muctini*); IV.506 (*Barcaei*).

would place the Arzuges in the area around Chott El Djerid between southern Byzacium and western Tripolitania.<sup>190</sup> No other names can be placed with any confidence at all, although various attempts have been made to identify the toponyms scattered throughout the text. In effect, we are left trying to extrapolate a pattern from only five or six firm data points, with many elements completely unknown.

These few clues have been pieced together in different ways. In two important studies, Joseph Patsch and Martin Riedmüller argued that the catalogue was organized along essentially geographical lines and that the three main sections of the digression corresponded to different regions within North Africa.<sup>191</sup> Patsch argued that the first section (II. 28–84) listed groups from Byzacium. This was based primarily on the known position of Antalas' Frexes near Thelepte and the possible association of the *Gurubi montana* with the Curbissenses – a group located on the southern frontier of the province in the fourth-century *Cosmographia* of Julius Honorius.<sup>192</sup> Riedmüller suggested that the *fluvius* Vadara might be identified with the Bagradas in northern Tunisia, and hence that this first section also included groups from across Zeugitana who rose in revolt, and later scholars developed this further.<sup>193</sup> Both accepted that lines 85–137 describe groups from Tripolitania on the strength of the long discussions of the Ilaguas and the Austur, and the god Gurzil, all of which were confidently placed in that region.<sup>194</sup> Finally, references in lines 138–61 to the regions of Gemini Petra and Zerquilis, echo similar toponyms in Procopius' account of southern Numidia, and the Arzuges were located in a similar area by other sources.<sup>195</sup> According to this reading, the first part of the catalogue listed the Moors of Byzacium (and perhaps of Zeugis), the second the Moors of Tripolitania and Syrtica and the third the Moors of Numidia. Explaining the catalogue in this way allowed otherwise unknown groups to be plotted at appropriate points on the map, and generated a more or less coherent ethnographic geography of the frontier zone. This approach was also followed by Charles Diehl in his own

<sup>190</sup> Desanges (1989); Morizot in Leveau et al. (1990), 55–9; Modéran (2003a), 364–74.

<sup>191</sup> Patsch (1875), 293–8, and Patsch (1879), viii–xiv, developed in Patsch (1896), 21–6; Riedmüller (1919), 15–21, and compare the summary of Modéran (2003a), 55–8.

<sup>192</sup> Patsch (1896), 22; Jul Hon. 42 (*mons Gerbessa*), 48 (*Curbissenses gens*)

<sup>193</sup> Riedmüller (1919), 7, following Tissot (1888), 469. And compare since Fevrier (1985), 300, suggesting that the Curbissenses might also be associated with Cap Bon: an argument demolished by Modéran (2003a), 77.

<sup>194</sup> Patsch (1896), 27–8; Riedmüller (1919), 21–6.

<sup>195</sup> Patsch (1896), 28–9; Riedmüller (1919), 26–8. Proc. BVII.19.20.

interpretation of the passage, and it proved influential in the period that followed.<sup>196</sup>

Yves Modéran revisited the basic structure of the catalogue in a rich but complex reading of the text around a century later.<sup>197</sup> In his view, Corippus' survey was organized as a sequential narrative rather than as a geographical survey, and was intended to highlight the unprecedented involvement of both 'internal' and 'external' Moors within the conflict. He argued that the passage introduced different groups in the chronological order in which they joined the revolt, and was not intended as a synchronous survey.<sup>198</sup> This reading supported by the temporal rather than spatial conjunctions which connect the groups in the list (*inde . . . hinc*). The catalogue starts with the statement that Antalas and the Frexes were the first to go to war (*primus init bellum*), with other groups taking their place in turn.<sup>199</sup> The significant break at II.85, which Partsch and Riedmüller regarded as the shift from a survey of the tribes of Africa and Byzacium to those of Tripolitania, Modéran regarded as an assertion of Antalas' agency within the catalogue, and his responsibility for the events that followed.<sup>200</sup> The catalogue turns to the groups of this region only because Antalas sent word there to join him in revolt:

A messenger, transported to the furthest reaches of Libya, called these indomitable groups to fight far from their homes.<sup>201</sup>

Modéran's essentially political reading of the catalogue led to a recalibration of the geographical order within the text, but he too assumed that the structure remained essentially spatial. Procopius' statement that Antalas was the *de facto* leader of all of the 'Moors' in Byzacium convinced Modéran that none of the groups in the list that follows could have come from this region.<sup>202</sup> He was also sceptical about the identification of the Vadara and Gurubi montana in Africa Proconsularis.<sup>203</sup> Instead, he identified Autiliten and Sidifan as Syrtic leaders and argued that the peoples listed in II.48–74 were all located in western Tripolitania, that is to say in the frontier region closest to imperial control.<sup>204</sup> Those listed from II.85–137 he placed in eastern Tripolitania and beyond. Corippus regarded all of these

<sup>196</sup> Diehl (1896), 301–5. Courtois (1955), 348, n. 7, is more sceptical.

<sup>197</sup> Modéran (2003a), 43–120 and *passim*. <sup>198</sup> Modéran (2003a), 58–60.

<sup>199</sup> But compare Virg. *Aen* VII.647, which opens his catalogue with the same phrase.

<sup>200</sup> Modéran (2003a), 60–1.

<sup>201</sup> *Iob* II.85–6: *nuntius extremas Libyae transuectus in oras / conuocat indomitas externa ad proelia gentes*. Modéran (2003a), 59.

<sup>202</sup> Modéran (2003a), 70; Proc. *BV* II.21.17–18. <sup>203</sup> Modéran (2003a), 71, 77–103, 276–7.

<sup>204</sup> Modéran (2003a), 109 (with figure) and the map at page 114.



groups collectively as the ‘Marmaridae’, which explains his use of this ethnonym to sum up this section at II.138. Those listed in II.140–72, whom Partsch and Riedmüller had placed in Numidia, he identified as independent Moorish groups who joined the revolt on their own initiative. This included Numidians under the leadership of Iaudas (as earlier scholars recognized), but also others from the wider frontier such as the Arzuges, who otherwise fit poorly within a purely geographical schema.<sup>205</sup> Vincent Zarini anticipated and echoed some of Modéran’s conclusions in his own studies of Book II, which were developed at the same time.<sup>206</sup> Since then, this has more or less become the accepted reading of the catalogue, although the complexities of Modéran’s argument have confused this issue somewhat.

All of these interpretations are predicated on the assumption that Corippus’ catalogue followed a comprehensible order and that a sufficiently careful reading might uncover it. Equipped with modern maps and atlases, scholars have instinctively assumed a spatial ordering in their own interpretation of the text, even as they highlighted the other literary impulses behind it. Modéran’s ‘political’ reading of the catalogue, for example, was nevertheless accompanied by a map locating each group, and the passage remains an important resource for historical atlases.<sup>207</sup> But there is little evidence that the poet or his audience would have felt that a cartographic structure would have been necessary in an epic catalogue, and earlier poetic lists are frequently haphazardly organized. Virgil’s list of the Italian groups is not ordered geographically, as Modéran acknowledges.<sup>208</sup> Lucan’s catalogue of African tribes in Book IV follows only a very approximate east-west trajectory, but this rapidly becomes jumbled, even with a relatively small group of names.<sup>209</sup> Silius Italicus charts the belligerent coastal settlements of Carthage, Cyrenaica and the Syrtic coast, but then abandons spatial organization entirely when he lists the groups of the interior.<sup>210</sup> Neither Claudian nor Sidonius betrays any knowledge of the African interior at all, and this was evidently not required for an appreciation of their work.<sup>211</sup> Latin poetry often had a sophisticated spatial dimension, as recent studies have shown, but this rarely involved

<sup>205</sup> Modéran (2003a), 60–1, 112–13.

<sup>206</sup> Zarini (1997), 35–46; 143–73. Both scholars refer extensively to one another’s work.

<sup>207</sup> Modéran (2003a), 114. Compare for example Maps 35 (Tripolitana) and 37 (Syrtica) of the *Barrington Atlas*.

<sup>208</sup> Modéran (2003a), 60. <sup>209</sup> Luc. *BC* IV.666–86. <sup>210</sup> Sil Ital., *Pun.* III.231–324.

<sup>211</sup> The short catalogues in Claudian, *I Cons Stil.*, 248–63 and 351–7 and Sid Ap *Carm.*, V. 335–49 are not presented in geographical order.

simple adherence to a fixed body of cartographic knowledge.<sup>212</sup> If Corippus had followed a systematic geographical order in his African catalogue, then, he would have been the first poet to do so.

It is helpful here to consider the sources that Corippus is likely to have drawn upon within this catalogue. There can be little doubt that his information was contemporary, and we cannot simply dismiss this as a compilation of obscure-sounding group names assembled for literary effect. Certain correspondences between ethnonyms included within the list, and those found in classical or early Islamic sources suggest that he drew upon an authentic local source, and linguistic factors – like the preponderance of Sil- names – also point in the same direction.<sup>213</sup> The reappearance of a small number of these ethnonyms in classical and medieval accounts should not be taken as clear evidence for the perpetuation of unbroken ‘tribal’ identities throughout this period (not least because recurring names like these are very much in the minority in the profusion of ethnonyms attested in our different sources), but they do demand that we take the poet’s information seriously. We are left with a plausible collection of North African proper names, ethnonyms and toponyms, presented in a way that includes many of the elements of an epic catalogue, but with some peculiar anomalies. The fact that most of the names included in the catalogue do not appear elsewhere in the *Iohannis* may also indicate that he depended upon a distinct source for this section of the poem.

Several explanations have been put forward for the origins of this material. It has generally been assumed that a great deal of Corippus’ ethnographic information came from the personal observations and military reports of the army. In part this must be true, and the details of military actions in particular can only have come from sources like this, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.<sup>214</sup> But the assumption that this catalogue was based on material provided by John or members of his command explains neither the information nor Corippus’ decision to present it in the way that he does. It is hard to see why lists of obscure Moorish peoples or places would have been included in campaign reports, for example, especially in the case of the fifteen or sixteen groups who are identified only by local landmarks, or the many others who were not

<sup>212</sup> See for example Dominik (2009); Skempis and Ziogas (2013). See also Horsfall (1985), 195: ‘No expectation existed in Augustan Rome that the geographical information in a work of literature should be precise.’ The full implications of this are explored in detail in Merrills (2017a), 234–78 (with particular reference to geographies of the Nile).

<sup>213</sup> Partsch (1896), 23. <sup>214</sup> Rubin (1995), 52; Zarini (1997), 42–4.

sufficiently important to be included in the main narrative of the *Iohannis*. The assumption that Corippus' catalogue was ordered geographically, and presented groups by their relative position in each province, is also predicated on a cartographic view of the world, and this is anachronistic.<sup>215</sup> It is possible, of course, that Corippus made sense of contemporary military reports with the help of existing geographical information available to him in Carthage, but this too leaves us with questions, not least the form that this additional information took. Military archives of geographical material do not seem to have existed in the Roman world in the way many modern commentators have assumed, and in fact developed relatively late even in modern empires.<sup>216</sup> The fact that the poet was himself African, and that he wrote for an audience of his compatriots, may have allowed him to fit new information within a mental geography of the frontier zone which had developed either through formal education or through a lifetime living in the region. Existing texts may have helped with this: lists of barbarian *gentes* were a staple of Roman and post-Roman geography, as works like the Verona List or the *Cosmographia* of Julius Honorius remind us. But again, Corippus' is not a systematic list of African *gentes*, but rather a jumbled collection of places, peoples and unnamed groups, compiled in a manner similar to – but not quite like – a traditional epic catalogue. If Corippus adapted his material to fit this new form, we must wonder why he did so. If his source took this form originally, it seems unlikely that he drew directly upon military reports.

### The Catalogue as Triumph

The likeliest source for the details included in the catalogue was not a campaign record in its raw form, but rather the repackaged version of the same information that might have been included the victory ceremony at the end of the campaign.<sup>217</sup> Such a source would explain both the material

<sup>215</sup> Merrills (2017a), 206–33, challenges the common view that military geographical intelligence in the Roman period was archived efficiently and contributed to a cartographic knowledge of the world.

<sup>216</sup> The traditional view of Roman military archives is articulated clearly in Sherck (1974), especially 543: 'Their reports and memoirs formed permanent storehouses of raw material for the future use of geographers and other men of science.' This assumption underpins much important work, including most obviously Nicolet (1991) on Augustan geography. Yet studies of more recent imperial cartographies belie this confidence. See for example the exemplary discussion of Cook (2006) (on the haphazard archival practices of the East India Company) and the exploration of this in the particular context of Roman knowledge of the Upper Nile in Merrills (2017a), 206–16, a region that was both comparatively well known and easy to map, in contrast to the Libyan interior.

<sup>217</sup> This section develops an argument outlined in Merrills (2019).

presented in the catalogue and its peculiar order, and also illuminates the function of the passage within the wider narrative of the epic. As we saw in Chapter 3, the unfolding story of the *Iohannis* is ultimately resolved in the triumph or *adventus* ceremony which marked the successful conclusion of John's campaigns and ostensible moment of the poem's performance. Corippus established this narrative trajectory in a number of ways, not least through direct references to the victory celebrations in the preface, and a range of proleptic allusions to the triumph throughout the epic. These include Putzintulus' dying vision of the parade in Book VIII, the surrender of Zabbas and Camelus, and the misunderstood prophecies of the Moorish oracles.<sup>218</sup> The catalogue contributes to this pattern. By presenting the assembling of the Moorish forces prior to the first battle in imagery which directly evokes the parade of the same foes in defeat, Corippus adds to this rich narrative framing. This also has important implications for the ethnographic information preserved within the passage.

Triumphs were a common aspect of Roman military ideology from the early Republic, had developed into major civic festivals by the first century CE and continued in some form into late antiquity.<sup>219</sup> We know frustratingly little about the nature of triumphal processions in the fifth and sixth centuries, and less than we would like about the exact choreography of these ceremonies even in earlier periods.<sup>220</sup> Processions typically included the prisoners taken on campaign and the trophies won, as well as the troops who had earned this victory. Procopius states that the triumph awarded to Belisarius in 534 was something of a novelty, and his description indicates that it was the emperor who was the focus of those festivities rather than the victorious general as was conventional, but many traditional elements seem to have been retained. The defeated Vandal king, Gelimer, was an important living trophy for the victor, and with him a procession of Vandals, Alans and Moors, as well as the impressive plunder taken in Carthage.<sup>221</sup> We know from accounts of earlier imperial triumphs that prisoners and plunder were often given placards (*tituli*) to help with identification and allow spectators to make

<sup>218</sup> See Chapter 3. <sup>219</sup> McCormick (1986) is essential.

<sup>220</sup> Beard (2007), especially 81–101 emphasizes the scale of our ignorance on the details of triumphal processions (and the wishful thinking involved in some reconstructions).

<sup>221</sup> Proc. *BV* II.9.1–12; *Buildings* 1.10.16. Lydus *De Mag* 2.2. On this triumph, see especially McCormick (1986), 125–9; Börm (2013). That both prisoners and plunder were paraded in this triumph is indicated by Corippus, *Iust* II.125–7 and III.121–5, as well as the account of the Vandal loot taken from Rome in 455 in Proc. *BV* I.5.3–5 (the same material was brought to Constantinople eighty years later). The unusual nature of the triumph is reiterated by Justinian's refusal of a similar ceremony following Belisarius' victories in Italy (Proc. *BG* III.1.1–4).

sense of the confusing display before them.<sup>222</sup> The most elaborate of these ceremonies, such as the Flavian triumph following the Jewish War in 79, also seem to have included paintings, personifications and dioramas to depict crucial moments in the campaign.<sup>223</sup> While imperial triumphs had become much scarcer by the sixth century, it is clear that local victory processions continued to take place, and there is good reason to think that geographical tokens of this kind remained a feature of the processions.<sup>224</sup> Belisarius followed the ceremony of 534 with further processions to mark the beginning and end of his consular year, but which may have had similar trappings.<sup>225</sup> Solomon celebrated two parades in Carthage in the same year, following his victories over the Moors, and Procopius notes that both featured the display of prisoners and plunder.<sup>226</sup> At the start of Book VI, Corippus describes a victory parade following the victory at Antonia Castra in 546, and it is clear that the final success on the campaign was commemorated in a similar fashion.<sup>227</sup>

While triumphs drew their inspiration from the campaigns they celebrated, and transmitted news of otherwise unknown places to the populace of the city, these ‘native geography lessons’ propounded a view of the world that was resolutely uncartographical.<sup>228</sup> The order in the displays was determined principally by the relative importance of the defeated enemies, and then by a rhetoric of variety and multiplicity rather than any sort of geographical order. Conquered peoples and cities, rivers, mountains and other topographical elements would be presented in a manner that fed the curiosity of the crowd and satisfied a taste for variety, but which were not otherwise spatially coherent. Order came from the sheer proliferation of people, places and things in procession, and by their shared connection as having all been conquered by Rome and brought within the capital. This is

<sup>222</sup> Ovid. *Tr.* 4.2.19–20; Prop 3.4.16; Plin. *HN* 33.54. See Merrills (2017a), 78–86.

<sup>223</sup> Famously described in Josephus. *BJ* 7.123–57.

<sup>224</sup> Earlier processions: McCormick (1986), 80–130; Börm (2013), 69–70. Compare for example Claud *III Cons Stil.* 14–29 and *VI Cons Hon* 375–83, which describe parades with very traditional trophies.

<sup>225</sup> Proc. *BV* II.9.15–16; *BG* I.5.18. That these celebrations also involved the distribution of gold donatives is indicated by Justinian’s outlawing of exactly this practice in 537 [Just *Nov.* 105]. Compare Kruse (2018), 191–2.

<sup>226</sup> Proc. *BV* II.11.55–6 (identified as an *epinikion*); II.12.29. Compare *Iob* III.300–1 (praising John for his participation in Solomon’s triumphs). Antalas’ participation in Roman triumphs during his period of loyalty is alluded to in *Iob* II.373–6, IV.370–1 and IV.380–3. These are presumably the same events.

<sup>227</sup> See *Iob* VI.53–103, and the discussion in Chapter 3.

<sup>228</sup> Murphy (2004), 160. The uncartographic nature of these ‘lessons’ is explored in detail in Merrills (2017a), 69–105.

illustrated quite clearly by Pliny's account of the tokens borne in the triumph of Cornelius Balbus in 19 BCE:

It is wonderful that our authors had recorded the above-mentioned towns captured by [Balbus], and in addition to Cidamum and Garama, the names and representations of the other peoples and towns were led forth and in his triumph, and came in this order: the town of Tabudium, the *natio* of Niteris, the town of Miglis Gemella, the *natio* or town of Bubeium, the *natio* of the Enipi, the town of Tuben, the mountain called Niger, Nitibrum, the town of Rapsa, the *natio* of Viscera, the town of Decri, the river Nathabur, the town of Thapsagum, the *natio* of Tamiagi, the town of Boin, the town of Pege, the river Dasibari; then following towns: Baracum, Bulba, Halasit, Galsa, Balla, Maxalla, Cizania; and *mons* Giri, and a *titulus* stating that precious stones came from there.<sup>229</sup>

As it happens, Balbus' triumph was over regions and groups similar to those contested in the campaigns of 546–8.<sup>230</sup> Both generals campaigned around the southern frontier zone and into the Sahara. For Balbus, of course, the headline victories were those in Cidamus (Ghadames) and Garama, the major settlements of the Cidamensi and Garamantes in the Sahara, and it was for good reason that these victories were celebrated prominently in his ceremony. But it is the other tokens of the triumph that are most noteworthy here, and particularly the manner in which they are presented. Here, we see a succession of *nationes* (Niteris, Bubeium, Enip etc.), but the procession is complemented with towns (Tabudium, Miglis Gemella), two mountains (Niger, Giri) and a river (Nathabur). Close investigation of the toponyms themselves has revealed that there is no geographical organization in this procession: locations in southern Numidia and the coast of Tripolitania are jumbled alongside those from the interior, yet Pliny's account clearly implies that his sources followed the order of the ceremony.<sup>231</sup>

Especially striking for our purposes is the structural similarity between Pliny's account of Balbus' triumph and the catalogue of tribes in *Iohannis* II. Here again, important foes are accorded a prominent position (here Antalas and the Ilagus most importantly, but also the unnamed *dux*), with smaller groups following along in a more or less indistinguishable jumble. Ethnonyms are included in Corippus' list, but these are much less systematic than we might expect from campaign records or from a well-ordered

<sup>229</sup> Plin. *HN*, V.36–7 my translation.

<sup>230</sup> Merrills (2016) discusses these campaigns and their triumphal commemoration.

<sup>231</sup> Desanges (1980), 404–7; Mattingly (2000); summarized in Merrills (2016), 122–3.

geographical source. Instead, they appear alongside the names of leaders and topographical features. The many unnamed *gentes* within the catalogue can thus be explained as a way of including the geographical tokens and trophies of the parade within an order of battle, or (to put it another way) can be seen as a feature of precisely this translation of triumph into epic catalogue.

The catalogue in Book II was not an exact description of John's victory ceremony in 548: the Moorish alliance had changed over the intervening period, as had the political circumstances. Ierna had been killed in the fighting of 546, and while it is possible that some representation of the fallen leader was included in a triumphal parade – as seems to have happened with Carcasan after his death – it is probably simpler to give Corippus credit for tailoring his catalogue to the narrative demands of his epic.<sup>232</sup> On the other hand, a victory ceremony does explain some of the anomalous elements within this list. The multiple references to forests, for example, have frequently puzzled modern commentators given the relative dearth of trees in the southern frontier region, but may be explained simply as a common visual feature of a victory procession.<sup>233</sup> The Astrices also sit oddly within an account of the Moorish allies in 546: Corippus later states that they allied with John in the following year and maintained that they had long enjoyed peaceful relations with the empire.<sup>234</sup> Such a group could have appeared in a triumphal parade, however. Earlier imperial geography commonly conflated diplomatic deference with military victory, and much the same may have happened here. The unnamed *Dux* of line 148 might also be explained in this context. This is commonly assumed to be Iaudas on the strength of the Numidian groups he is said to have led, and this seems plausible: Iaudas was the most prominent leader in the Aurès and had resisted Solomon in the later 530s and allied with Guntharith in 545–6. He seems to have been among the belligerents of 546.<sup>235</sup> Corippus insists that Iaudas changed sides in the build up to John's final campaign, however, and states that he commanded a detachment of 12,000 allies at Campi Catonis.<sup>236</sup> Procopius, however, places him alongside Antalas among the defeated Moors.<sup>237</sup> Quite what

<sup>232</sup> The prophetic reference to Carcasan's 'presence' in the climactic triumph at *Ioh.* VI.169–72 and especially VI.184–7 indicate that his head was carried as a trophy in the triumph.

<sup>233</sup> *Ioh.* II.53, 57, 63. Compare Lassère (1984), 167 (who argues that these trees have since disappeared) Modéran (2003a), 71–3, 112 (who assumes a poetic licence). On modern assumptions of agricultural and vegetal decline since the classical period, see especially Davis (2007).

<sup>234</sup> *Ioh.* VI.399–436.

<sup>235</sup> Modéran (2003a), 60–1. On his life, compare Modéran (2000); *PLRE* III Iaudas.

<sup>236</sup> *Ioh.* VII.277–8. Modéran (2000), 3, detects allusions to Iaudas' earlier infidelity at VII.277 and VIII.126 (in contrast to the loyal Cusina).

<sup>237</sup> Proc. *BG* IV.17.21.

position Iaudas would have assumed in John's triumph cannot be known, but it is possible that Corippus' recasting of this ceremony in his tribal catalogue passed swiftly over him for reasons of tact.

The display of leaders, captives, plunder and geographical tokens in imperial ceremonies was a means of ordering the imperial world.<sup>238</sup> The presentation of these trophies disarticulated the conquered parts of the world and reassembled them into a new political geography in which places and peoples were defined by their subordination to Rome and not by their physical position in the world. Epic catalogues imposed their own order onto the world and created new connections. Both forms delighted in a superabundance of names and in the power of reconstituting them and lending them a new significance.<sup>239</sup> If Corippus' catalogue followed the order of a triumph we should not waste our time looking for spatial logic, or even clear narrative logic in his arrangement of this material. His juxtaposition of the Anacutas, the Celianas and the Imaclas, for example, need not imply that they were all from the same region, or that they joined Antalas' revolt at the same time, simply that they were placed alongside one another by the choreographer of John's triumph, or that Corippus made this adjustment for metrical reasons. Together, however, they helped establish the scale of the military task facing John Troglita, and the magnitude of his eventual victory. Above all else, this is a presentation of the *innumerae gentes* in all of their glorious profusion at the moment of their greatest *superbia*. Implicit within this, as the poem and its Virgilian leitmotiv remind us, is the inevitable subjection to Rome which must follow.

### Conclusions

Ultimately, the ethnography of the *Iohannis* comprises several different taxonomies. The poet deployed generic terms, poetic language and surprisingly precise ethnonyms (and toponyms) to encompass the Moorish population on the edge of the imperial world. Corippus attributes a range of social and political behaviours to these groups with little obvious concern about apparent contradiction: they include pastoralists and farmers, the inhabitants of deserts and forests; they were ruled by leaders who claimed priestly functions, and appealed to oracles for their authority, but also by others who seem to have been charged with military leadership alone; some groups had councils of elders while others had no such

<sup>238</sup> See Merrills (2017a), 78–105, for a full development of this point.

<sup>239</sup> Compare Veyne (2005), 379–418, on this tendency in earlier Roman imperialism.



structure. It is a struggle to reconcile these competing images, and it is very likely that each of these characteristics was reflective of one or more groups which developed across this vast region in the mid-sixth century. But the chaotic contradiction of Corippus' account was part of the point that he wished to make. The poet would never have intended his disparate portraits to be neatly mapped in a historical atlas, nor is there any evidence that he worked from an existing body of authoritative geographical knowledge.

Corippus' *Iohannis* presents the Moorish world through a shattered mirror – a profusion of groups of different sizes and kinds, all more or less recognizable, many unsettling and strange. They encompassed a political continuum from the most barbaric groups, who had long been familiar from the epic tradition – groups like the Garamantes or Nasamones who had always lived beyond the practical control of the empire – to figures like Cusina whose sensibility (and perhaps parentage) made them almost Roman in their attitudes. All were unambiguously *Mauri*, *Maurusii* or *Massyli*. This sheer multitude demonstrated the scale of the task facing John – not only in the extent of the military victory that was needed over Moors in arms, but also in the delicacy of the diplomatic efforts ultimately required to gather these different groups together beneath the aegis of empire. The *Iohannis* can provide some nuggets of information, and doubtless will continue to be an invaluable repository for scholars seeking points of reference on specific ethnonyms or certain political and social behaviours. But we need to be acutely aware of the wider context in which this information was presented, and should not assume that Corippus' Moorish panorama was ever intended to be a problem to be solved or a coherent model to be mapped.

One of the frustrations of Corippus' treatment of the Moorish world in the *Iohannis* is that it defies straightforward classification. The importance of allied Moors to John's campaigns, and ultimately to Corippus' own political understanding of the world and the place of Africa within it, meant that his representation was not the simple opposition of nefarious, anarchic Moors on the one hand and civilizing benevolent Romans on the other. But neither was his account a consistent portrait of complex contemporary ethnography. Different parts of the *Iohannis* present different images of the Moors. There was evidently a distinction in the poet's mind (and perhaps in imperial strategy) between the groups of the Tripolitanian frontier and the Syrtic pre-desert and those who originated within Byzacium or Numidia, but Corippus was perfectly happy to blur this when his narrative – or poetic effect – demanded it, and it seems likely that this was also true for the groups who lived in this region themselves.

Equally, his formidable 'catalogue of tribes' in Book II probably reflects accurately the Moorish world as it appeared in the triumphal celebrations which followed John's victory, and this too tells us something – about a certain imperial perspective on a fragmented world – but it cannot be read with confidence either as an ethnographic 'map' of the frontier or as a systematic roll call of the barbarian groups which joined Antalas' rebellion. Corippus' silence on the vast majority of these groups elsewhere in the *Iohannis*, and the introduction of a range of new ethnonyms as the poem progresses, indicate that the poet was not concerned to present the Moorish world systematically, and may not even have thought this was possible. As archaeology and comparative anthropological studies show, this was a complex world in which political and social affiliations could be malleable, particularly in times of profound upheaval as was the case in the 540s. The *Iohannis* does not provide us with a single 'snapshot' of Moorish Africa, but rather a sequence of disjointed, disrupted, overlapping portraits. This too may be significant, and looking closely at this dissonance is an important step in appreciating the *Iohannis* as a source.

*'For Every Blade Was Red'*  
*War and Bloodshed in the Iohannis*

I sing about banners and leaders, fierce peoples and the destruction of war, about the betrayal and slaughter of men, and their hard trials; about disasters in Libya and of enemies whose strength was broken, of the hunger men had to endure and of the thirst which struck both armies with deadly confusion; I sing of peoples laid low and subjugated, and of a leader who sealed these deeds with a great triumph.<sup>1</sup>

Above all else, the *Iohannis* was a poem about war. For historians of Byzantine Africa, this is something of a mixed blessing. Corippus' epic provides us with our only detailed narrative of the campaigns of 546–8, which were vital to the consolidation of imperial authority after the disruption of the previous decade. This complements a rich body of other evidence for the Byzantine military presence in North Africa, especially the writing of Procopius, the imperial laws and the archaeology and epigraphy relating to the Justinianic fortifications.<sup>2</sup> The *Iohannis* includes unique information on the leadership of the imperial army, not least though the preservation of a rich archive of personal names which were certainly taken from life and reveal a great deal about the officer corps of John's army.<sup>3</sup> Read with care, Corippus also presents considerable evidence for Moorish military activity and the nature of resistance to imperial rule.

Yet the literary impulses behind the epic pose serious challenges. Corippus speaks explicitly of his desire to celebrate the deeds of a new Aeneas, and systematically recasts John's actions against the models provided by Homer, Lucan, Silius Italicus and Statius, as well as Virgil.<sup>4</sup> The long descriptions of battles which dominate the *Iohannis* wear this classical inheritance particularly heavily, and the gruesome displays of heroic single combat John and his officers performed can have borne little resemblance

<sup>1</sup> *Iob* 1.1–7: *Signa duces gentesque feras Martisque ruinas, | insidias stragesque uirum durosque labores | et Libycas clades ac fractos uiribus hostes | indictamque famem populis laticesque negatos, | utraque letifero turbantes castra tumultu, | turbatos stratosque cano populosque subactos, | ductorem et magno signantem facta triumpho.*

<sup>2</sup> This material is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. <sup>3</sup> Riedlberger (2010b). <sup>4</sup> *Iob* Proem; 1.1–7.

to the realities of battle. Extended passages relate the wounding, mutilation and killing of multiple Moors in a form that seems startling to the modern reader. At such moments, the systematic narrative of events on campaign gives way to heavily stylized (and very bloody) exhibition of violence, as if a sober documentary film had been punctuated by the glamourized action sequences of John Woo or Quentin Tarantino. While the traces of the epic tradition are less immediately obvious elsewhere in the poem, they are still there: battlefield topography, accounts of sieges, motivations for war, barbarian strategy, even accounts of weapons and armour were all inflected by the familiar tropes of Latin epic and consequently must be interpreted with caution. Careful comparison of Corippus' text with earlier epics offers one way around this, corroboration with contemporary historical texts another, but the going is slow and frequently frustrating.

Corippus' decision to narrate John's campaign in epic verse deserves to be considered on its own terms. In itself, this reveals a great deal about the Byzantine military presence in North Africa and how it was understood at the time. Most studies of the *Iohannis* have been content to assume that the framing of a recent conflict in epic language could only have been intended to reflect the glories of imperial conquest: indeed, this has become virtually axiomatic in much modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup> But while panegyrics typically presented imperial conquest in relatively bloodless terms – of battles won, enemies conquered and barbarians subjected – epics dwelled at far greater length on the visceral and the abject, on the suffering and pain of the defeated quite as much as the glories of victory. Wounds are described in extraordinary – and escalating – detail by the classical epicists, and Corippus made a dramatic contribution to this bloody tradition. This is an aspect of the poem which several modern commentators have noted with distaste: the 1,000 or so lines of hacking and piercing, and of blades stained with blood, have been read as little more than a grotesque example of Corippus' poetic ingenuity, and they were certainly this.<sup>6</sup> But this bloodshed also complicates any reading of the *Iohannis* as a rote celebration of imperial power. John is presented as a new Aeneas in the poem – as better than Aeneas in some ways, as we shall see – but this also brings with it some more troubling notes. The general's heroic killings lead to the deaths of many, at one point including the women, children and livestock of a Moorish camp. The effect was to bring the brutality of battle

<sup>5</sup> Compare for example Kern (2007); Schindler (2007), 181–2; Schindler (2009), 234; and the discussion of the panegyric aspects of Corippus' epic in Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> Vinchesi (1983), 31, discusses the Lucanian 'baroque realism' of these accounts. On this tendency in scholarship as a whole, see especially Riedlberger (2010), 348–50.

startlingly to life for a Carthaginian audience and to provide a dramatic catharsis after more than a decade of upheaval and conflict.

The present chapter addresses these issues in three sections. It looks first at the value of Corippus' account for understanding the campaigns of 546–8. The *Iohannis* is our only major historical source for these events, beyond passing references in Jordanes' *Romana* and in the Greek histories of Procopius and Theophanes, but the outline it presents can be read with some confidence. Here, Corippus' account is more straightforward than it is for the period from circa 530–46, discussed in Chapters 2–3. In contrast to the earlier analepsis, this account is largely expressed from a single narrative perspective (the only major exception is the return of Liberatus to narrate a mission to Iunci in Book VII).<sup>7</sup> Although certain details must still be treated with caution – perhaps most obviously the circumstances of the second campaign in 547, which the poet passes over quite quickly – a relatively detailed reconstruction is possible, and is attempted here. This provides some impression of the developing strategy of the Byzantine army in the field and the means by which John Troglita was able to re-establish imperial control in Africa. The second part of the chapter discusses the evidence provided by Corippus for the size and constitution of the Byzantine army, and the strategy it employed on campaign, as well as the few clues about Moorish military activity that can be sifted from the text.

The final part of the chapter considers the representations of battle in Corippus' epic. The accounts of the struggles at Antonia Castra, Marta and Campi Catonis represent around one fifth of the total length of the *Iohannis*, yet have rarely been discussed in detail by historians. The battle narratives themselves are heavily conventionalized and offer little light on the historical events of 546, 547 or 548, but Corippus' decision to render the recent campaigns in this mode remains important. Latin historical epic was a moribund form in the sixth century, and the poet's choice to celebrate John's victories through the visceral *topoi* of this genre, rather than the more bloodless language of panegyric, is worthy of note. Detailed descriptions of fighting, wounds and gruesome death had become more common in prose historiography in late antiquity, and Corippus combined this developing taste with a genre which revelled in such treatment. In framing John's victories in this way, Corippus presented the victory in 548 as a cathartic moment which had definitively ended a period of infighting and political uncertainty and had set the imperial province on a newly firm footing. The graphic violence of

<sup>7</sup> *Ioh* VII.475–97.

Corippus' battle accounts distinguished friend from foe, allied Moor from hostile rebel, cutting through the ambiguities of the recent past and the confused political ethnography of Africa.

### John's Campaigns: 546–548

It was significant that John made his first landfall at Carthage, rather than on the coast of Byzacium, as Belisarius had done thirteen years earlier.<sup>8</sup> The capital was the nerve centre of imperial Africa and was crucial to his political and military programme. By the time he landed, imperial control had been restored in the city following Guntharith's coup earlier in the year, but John would still have needed to establish relations with the Praetorian Prefect Athanasius and the existing administration.<sup>9</sup> The expeditionary army which arrived with John was relatively small, and an arrival in Carthage would have been a necessary stage in both integrating the scattered Africa garrison under his control, and in ensuring the security of his lines of supply. Corippus and Procopius both affirm that John left Carthage immediately and that he set out to engage Antalas' army in northern Byzacium.<sup>10</sup> Neither specifies the route that he followed, but it seems plausible that he headed first for the coastal fortress of Hadrumetum, which had formed a last redoubt of imperial loyalists during the Guntharith revolt, and would have been a natural base of operations in the province. Once in Byzacium, John's army was joined by the *Dux Byzacena* Marcentius and the troops under his command before moving inland.<sup>11</sup> Corippus states that the first contact with Antalas and the rebellious troops took place at Antonia Castra among the 'wide fields of Byzacena', but the toponym is otherwise unknown.<sup>12</sup> A location in the hinterland of Hadrumetum seems plausible, but the battle could easily have taken place anywhere in the northern part of the Tunisian Sahel.<sup>13</sup>

John's first action was to send envoys to Antalas in the hope of securing peace. This was standard imperial policy in North Africa, and represented a sensible precaution given the political upheaval of recent months.<sup>14</sup> The *Iohannis* dramatizes John's initial embassy to Antalas and its hostile

<sup>8</sup> *Ioh* I.350–416 implies that John contemplated landing at Caput Vada before sailing to the capital.

<sup>9</sup> For the outline, see Chapter 2. <sup>10</sup> *Ioh* I.417–20; compare Proc. *BV* II.28.46.

<sup>11</sup> This can be inferred from the presence of Marcentius in John's army at *Ioh* IV.532 and V.447.

<sup>12</sup> *Ioh* II.460–3.

<sup>13</sup> On the likely location, compare Partsch (1879), xxviii; Pringle (1981), 34; Dodi (1986b), 593; Rubin (1995), 51 (who suggests a location near Sufetula).

<sup>14</sup> *Ioh* II.357–413; compare Proc. *BV*.II.11.2–8; II.21.20; II.25.15 on similar approaches under Belisarius and Solomon.

reception in the Moorish camp, but this was not merely a poetic conceit. As we saw in Chapter 2, Antalas' political affiliation in the late summer of 546 was unresolved. John may have hoped to find agreement with a rebel who had declared his loyalty to the emperor earlier in the same year, who had probably not rescinded it since.<sup>15</sup> Other Moorish leaders must have been contacted at the same time, including Cusina, who had supported Guntharith throughout his coup, and other regional power brokers like Ifisdaias in Numidia and Iaudas in the Aurès.<sup>16</sup> These initial overtures may not have been successful. Corippus implies that Cusina was among John's allies from the outset, but the poet's testimony on that leader is unreliable: he is the only source to include Cusina among Solomon's allies in 544, and is silent on his involvement in Guntharith's coup.<sup>17</sup> Procopius and Theophanes both indicate that Cusina allied with John only in 548, and he may have remained neutral (or simply kept his head down) in the first months of John's campaign.<sup>18</sup> At the very least, Cusina's loyalty could not have been assumed at the time of the landing, and John's energies in his early days and weeks in Africa must have been spent sounding out the strength of his Moorish support. This effort would have been complicated substantially by regional chains of command. As we have seen, local military alliances were typically the responsibility of provincial *duces* as much as the central military authority in Carthage, and it would have taken the new commander some time to gather these various diplomatic threads.<sup>19</sup> Doubtless this was complicated still further by the administrative upheaval in the immediate aftermath of the Guntharith rising, but John may well have been helped by his own connections in North Africa. Having served as a senior officer (and perhaps provincial *dux*) under Belisarius and Solomon, he would have been well positioned to set about securing fresh agreements for the campaign ahead.<sup>20</sup> Corippus presents the embassy to Antalas as an illustration of John's *clementia* before an inevitable conflict, but it is perfectly possible that the overtures were genuine and that the general had hopes of re-establishing relations with a leader who had long been a loyal servant to the emperor.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> *PLRE* III Cutzinas; Ifisdaias; Iaudas. Compare Modéran (2003a), 53–61; Guittard (2015).

<sup>17</sup> *Ioh* IV.509–10 places Cusina among John's allies in 546, and compare V.450–1. *Ioh* III.405–8 on Cusina's presence at Cillium (which seems unlikely). On this discrepancy, see especially Modéran (1990).

<sup>18</sup> Proc. *BG* IV.17.21; Theoph. 216 AM 6026 (Mango and Scott 1997, 306). <sup>19</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> A responsibility for diplomacy is implied at *Ioh* I.469–72. On his office, compare *PLRE* III Ioannes 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ioh* II.337–56, contra Diehl (1896), 368–9.

These overtures failed and John's army engaged with Antalas and his allies close to Antonia Castra in autumn 546.<sup>22</sup> The imperial army probably comprised around 10,000 infantry and cavalry, organized into nine regiments (*agmina*), and supported by local allies.<sup>23</sup> The coalition facing them is much more difficult to define, and here we are at the mercy of Corippus' confusing ethnography as we saw in Chapter 4.<sup>24</sup> Antalas led an alliance including groups from Byzacium and (perhaps) Numidia. These were joined by a substantial contingent of Moors from Tripolitania and Syrtica who had been active in the region over the preceding summers.<sup>25</sup> After a series of small skirmishes around the coastal towns, the two sides engaged and the Romans were victorious.<sup>26</sup> The *Iohannis* provides an order of battle for the Byzantine army and offers some hint of how these forces were laid out, along with some of the tactics that John employed, but all of this needs to be read with care, as we shall see. The Laguatan leader Ierna was killed during the fighting (apparently in flight from the field), but Antalas escaped.<sup>27</sup> Beyond that, little can be said with confidence about the course of the battle. Corippus' narrative implies that this was largely a cavalry engagement and that it reached its climax with the penetration and plundering of the Moorish camp. His narrative is largely conventionalized, however; it is made up of *topoi*, speeches and formulaic accounts of single combat, interspersed with authorial interjections on the changing fortunes of the battle. Although these passages – and the comparable accounts of Books VII and VIII – are an important feature of the *Iohannis*, they can tell us little about the sequence of events on the battlefield, and trying to sift specific information from them remains a treacherous business.<sup>28</sup>

In the aftermath of victory, John returned to Carthage with the rump of his army and reorganized the defence of the imperial provinces in the winter of 546/7. The system he implemented was essentially that outlined in Justinian's rescript of 534, but it also made use of the extensive programme of fortification undertaken in the intervening decade. Corippus explains this system in the direct speech of the general:

Now I intend to act, to hasten the protection of the Libyan frontiers (*fines*) with the customary guard, and restore our happy rule. Swiftly lead back

<sup>22</sup> A winter date (probably in early 547) is favoured by Partsch (1879), xxvi; Diehl (1896), 370; Bury (1923), II.147; Stein (1959), 555, n. 2 and Pringle (1981), 33. Modéran (2003a), 626–8 makes a conclusive case for the earlier date.

<sup>23</sup> See below 189–191. <sup>24</sup> See Chapter 4. <sup>25</sup> Modéran (2003a), 627–8. <sup>26</sup> *Ioh* II.187–234.

<sup>27</sup> *Ioh* V.516–21.

<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, attempts have been made to piece together the course of the battle from Corippus' account: see note 160.



your troops to their proper garrisons and fortify these positions. Encircle the high mountains in a net, the caves, pastures, rivers, the rocks of the forests, and the secret refuges. Then cautiously close off the surrounded areas. Within a short time, the impious Mazax will weaken and die of hunger.<sup>29</sup>

The reference to 'proper garrisons' (*proprias . . . sedes*) here alludes first to the systematic programme of defensive fortifications which had begun to defend the cities and major garrisons of Africa from the late 530s.<sup>30</sup> Equally relevant was the command structure:

'The two *duces* of Byzacium should take the utmost care to sow confusion among the distressed Massylian ranks, with pursuing ranks of their own, to harass their dismal phalanxes with their swords, and to drive the enemies far from our frontiers.' He said this, and all agreed to obey his words. Then the resplendent army split up, and each part made for its own citadel; they went to towns, forts and other places. Wretched Africa was freed from its long suffering and joyfully sang praises that serene John had conquered.<sup>31</sup>

The strategy presented here is straightforward: John wished his troops to expel Antalas and the remnants of his army from the provincial heartlands which were his power base and then to consolidate this position by reoccupying existing fortifications. Some of the specifics are more puzzling. The reference to two *duces* in Byzacena supersedes the single *Dux Byzacena* specified in the legislation of 534 and corroborated by all of our other sources.<sup>32</sup> Given that Justinian's edict identified two military capitals at Cillium and Thelepte, and given the recent strategic importance of Hadrumetum in addition to this, it is possible that John instituted a second (and temporary) ducal command in 546/7 in response to the particular difficulties in that province. It is also possible that he simply posted one of his field commanders (who also held the rank of *dux*) to the defence of the province, presumably in one of the military capitals.<sup>33</sup>

John spent the winter of 546/7 in Carthage and celebrated his victory there, but distressing news filtered into the city from around the world. In mid-December 546, Totila's capture of Rome had placed Belisarius in

<sup>29</sup> *Ioh.* VI.38–45: *nunc Libycos fines solito custode tueri | accelerare placet, felicia regna referre. | ocius in proprias numerosque reducite sedes | et munite locos. celsos indagine montes, | antra, nemus, fluuios, siluarum saxa, latebras | cingite et obsessas cauti concludite fauces. | tempore sub modico periet gens impia Mazax | deficietque fame.*

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 2. And compare *Ioh.* VI.265–6 – the same troops later comprise John's field army in 547.

<sup>31</sup> *Ioh.* VI.49–57: *Byzacii geminis ducibus sit maxima cura | Massylas acies acie turbare sequaci | sollicitas, tristes gladiis urgere phalanges, | et procul a nostris expellere finibus hostes: | dixerat, et cuncti dicto parere fatentur. | digressus proprias florens exercitus arces | inde petit: subeunt urbes castella locosque. | soluitur a longo miserabilis Africa luctu | et placidum gaudens cantat uicisse Iobannem.*

<sup>32</sup> *CJ* I.2.7.2.1a and see Chapter 2. <sup>33</sup> Partsch (1879), vii–viii.

a precarious position, and John may have been expected to send reinforcements to Italy to secure the imperial position there.<sup>34</sup> Far to the west, the Visigothic King Theudis launched an attack on the Byzantine outpost at Septem (Ceuta) on the southern shore of the Straits of Gibraltar.<sup>35</sup> The imperial garrison there was small, but the peninsula was strategically important, both to protect shipping in the strait and as a projection of imperial power in Spain and Gaul.<sup>36</sup> The Visigothic attack is only recorded briefly in a later historical account, and the date is not absolutely secure, but the crisis was certainly real. It is likely that the Visigoths took the fortress before being expelled by a counter-attack, presumably by troops despatched for the purpose from Carthage.

A more immediate problem arose in the southern provinces. The *Dux Tripolitanae*, Rufinus, sent word that the coastal cities had been attacked and that the barbarians of the region were threatening to move north towards Carthage.<sup>37</sup> These groups had rallied under the leadership of Carcasan, who had been among the defeated Moorish commanders at Antonia Castra, but who was to attain a new standing in the second phase of the war. Corippus makes clear that Carcasan was the aggressor in this conflict, driven by a heady mixture of false pagan prophecies which promised victory and a profound desire for vengeance for the defeat of the previous year.<sup>38</sup> An allusion to the poor harvest implies that the first phases took place some time during the late spring.<sup>39</sup> Procopius' brief sketch at the end of the *Vandal War* gives some sense of the significance of the threat:

But at a later time the *Leuathai* came again with a great army from the lands around Tripolis to Byzacium and united with the forces of Antalas. When John went to meet this army he was defeated in the battle, and losing many of his men, fled to Laribus. Then the army overran the whole country as far as Carthage, and treated in a terrible manner those Libyans who fell in their way.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Proc. *BG* III.13.1; III.20.4–31; Marc Com Add. a.547.5. Compare Partsch (1879), xxix; Diehl (1896), 371; Rubin (1995), 54.

<sup>35</sup> Isid. *Hist Goth* (LR) 42. This episode is chiefly dated by the reference to the death of Theudis 'shortly afterwards' in the following entry (LR 43). Diehl (1896), 343–4 and Bury (1923), II.146 prefer circa 544, partly on the strength of the allusion at Proc. *BG* II.30.15. For the case for the later dating (followed here), see Stein (1959), 561.

<sup>36</sup> *CJ* I.27.2.2; Proc. *BV* II.5.6; *Buildings* VI.7.14–16. See Villaverde Vega (2001), 358–62, on the strategic picture. See now Bernal Casasola and Villada Paredes (2020) with a summary of current thinking on the site.

<sup>37</sup> *Ioh* VI.221–7. <sup>38</sup> *Ioh* VI.104–26, 206–9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ioh* VI.246; Modéran (2003a), 631; Shaw (2013), 24.

<sup>40</sup> Proc. *BV* II.28.47–9; tr. Kaldellis (with minor modifications).

The fighting of 547 is the most difficult to piece together from the *Iohannis*. John's defeat doubtless encouraged the poet to pass over the campaign relatively swiftly, but Corippus' literary inclinations compound this problem. These impulses are not disguised: in a sadly corrupt passage, John Troglita inspires his troops by comparing their endeavour to the Libyan campaign of the Younger Cato, which had famously been recounted in the ninth book of Lucan's *Civil War*:

The burning zone will bear witness to your efforts, and the heavens will confirm it. When someone dares write of this, our descendants will read that I also, second after great Cato, attempted to . . .<sup>41</sup>

If John revelled in this comparison, it is unlikely his troops took much encouragement from it: Cato's westward march from Cyrenaica to Utica in 48 BCE resulted only in his defeat, and Lucan's rendering of the expedition dwells at length on the extraordinary sufferings the general and his men endured.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these difficulties, the *Iohannis* does allow us to trace a rough outline of the campaign. Corippus states that Carcasan and his followers first crossed into Byzacium, but retreated rapidly when news of John Troglita's departure from Carthage reached them.<sup>43</sup> John's field army was smaller than it had been in the previous year, but was large enough to force the Moors back from the provincial territories and towards the frontier.<sup>44</sup> Corippus provides very little detail on the geography of this campaign, and what there is often frustratingly imprecise:

And they did not hesitate to go beyond parched Gadaia, and those forsaken places in which there is no way to travel or to live.<sup>45</sup>

When the general realised that the enemy troops had retreated into the desert in fear, he pursued the fugitives with his customary courage, more boldly entering into the hot sands of the thirsty land.<sup>46</sup>

These references imply that the fighting took place on and beyond the southern frontier, and not in the heartlands of imperial Africa as Procopius

<sup>41</sup> *Ioh* VI.339–41: *uestros zona rubens referet testata labores | confirmante polo, a magnoque Catone secundum | me temptasse legent f'quoquo hanc scripsisse minores*. I am grateful to Aaron Peltari for suggesting an appropriate translation for this corrupt passage.

<sup>42</sup> *Luc. BC* IV.368–949. Discussed in Leigh (2000), who sets Lucan's passage in its own literary context. Compare Zarini (2003b), 148–51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ioh* VI.279–85. <sup>44</sup> *Ioh* VI.276–87. On the army size, see below 191.

<sup>45</sup> *Ioh* VI.285–7: *siccas superare Gadaias | nec dubitant tristesque locos, quis nullus eundi | uiuendique modus*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ioh* VI.292–5: *ductor ut hostiles sensit cessisse cateruas | per deserta metu, solita uirtute fugaces | insequitur, calidas terrae sitientis harenas | acrior ingrediens*.

suggests.<sup>47</sup> The toponym Gadaias is not otherwise known, but has plausibly been placed in western Tripolitania or its environs. Corippus includes a group from Gadabis alongside the *Muctuniana manus* from Tripolis in the catalogue of tribes in Book II, and Procopius locates the Gadabitani close to Lepcis.<sup>48</sup> Joseph Partsch also proposed that Gadaias may have been a loanword from a contemporary Berber language meaning something like 'dunes', and recent linguistic analysis has supported this interpretation.<sup>49</sup> Latin has no specific vocabulary for sand dunes, and the adoption of local terminology seems plausible, particularly as a means of accentuating the exotic strangeness of the southern fringes of the world. But the toponyms themselves do not give us much to go on. It is possible that John pursued the Moors into the Great Erg, or even towards Fezzan, before supply problems forced him to retreat to the coast; alternatively, the strategic manoeuvring between the two armies may have been limited to the frontier zone and the territories immediately beyond – that is, the area around the south of the Chotts and the Matmata plateau, where there are also dunes.<sup>50</sup> At any event, the imperial army eventually retreated to the coastal strip between the Matmata mountains and the coast. This was a crucial region strategically which controlled the coastal road between Tripolitania and Byzacium, and the connected the mainland with the island of Djerba to the north.<sup>51</sup> It was also well placed for resupply from the coast, but bad weather prevented this. While encamped in the region, John was approached by envoys from the Astrices who sought peace, but who do not seem to have taken part in the subsequent fighting.<sup>52</sup>

The engagement with Carcasan's forces probably took place near Marta (Mareth) a little to the south of Gabes, and in the heart of this strategically vital corridor.<sup>53</sup> The evidence for this is again slight, but persuasive enough. Corippus states that the battle was fought among the 'sad hills and malign fields of Gallica', and the Regio Gallica is listed alongside Marta and nearby Tillibaris and Talanteis in the catalogue of Book II, but as we have seen, this section of his text is hardly geographically coherent.<sup>54</sup> The narrative of

<sup>47</sup> Pringle (1981), 36; Modéran (2003a), 631.

<sup>48</sup> *Ioh* II.116–19; Proc. *Buildings* VI.4.12; compare Partsch (1879), xxxi; Modéran (2003a), 298–9, 653–4.

<sup>49</sup> Partsch (1879), xxxi. Murcia (2010) develops this point with full linguistic discussion.

<sup>50</sup> Compare Partsch (1879), xxxi–ii; Diehl (1896), 373–4; Pringle (1981), 36; Rubin (1995), 54; Modéran (2003a), 631–2; Breccia (2008), 77.

<sup>51</sup> Kaegi (2010), 54. <sup>52</sup> *Ioh* VI.391–407. <sup>53</sup> Lassère (1984), 165–6; Modéran (2003a), 631.

<sup>54</sup> *Ioh* VI.485–6: *collesque malignos | tristis et infaustos monstrabat Gallica campos*. Compare *Ioh*. II.76–81. For the location, see Partsch (1879), xxxiii; Riedmüller (1919), 21, and Pringle (1981), 36. The reference to *Marta mali genetrix* ('mother of evil') in II.81 anticipates the disaster to follow in Book VI. Compare Modéran (2003a), 72, and Zarihi (2003), 77.

Book VI suggests that a riverbed was prominent on the battlefield, and that the imperial troops initially set up in defence of a water supply, which might place it along one of the northerly wadi run-offs from the Matmata.<sup>55</sup> In the absence of other alternatives, then, this location seems plausible. Corippus' short order of battle for the Roman army implies that it included both infantry and cavalry elements, but his treatment of the Moorish army is cursory.<sup>56</sup> The account of the course of battle in the *Iohannis* is also heavily stylized. The final part of Book VI describes the heroic fighting of John Senior in the riverbed and ends with his final death on the sands where the river meets the sea; these final moments recall Lucan's treatment of Pompey's death at the mouth of the Nile in *Civil War* VIII.<sup>57</sup> While the riverine setting of the 'Battle of Marta' may have inspired these intertextual reflections, this should still caution us against reading too much into the details of the battle. Corippus implies that the outcome was decided in part by the flight of some of the allied Moors from the battlefield; at any event, the imperial coalition was scattered in the aftermath.<sup>58</sup> John was able to retreat in good order to a small fortified city on the coast.<sup>59</sup> This has not been identified, but was evidently to the south of Iunci and may have been close to the modern city of Gabes.

Corippus passes over the aftermath of this catastrophe relatively quickly. He states that some of the defeated army assembled on the coast at Iunci, but implies that the poor state of the fortifications made it unsuitable as a rallying point for the whole army.<sup>60</sup> Instead, John abandoned his southern offensive entirely and regrouped at the walled city of Laribus in the upland regions of north-eastern Numidia, where he spent the winter of 547/8; Procopius confirms this point.<sup>61</sup> Laribus was situated on the main road between Carthage and Theveste, and hence was well positioned for future campaigns in either Byzacium or Numidia. Crucially, it would also have facilitated the formation of new alliances with Moors from the same regions, and it is possible that it was chosen for this reason.<sup>62</sup> This reorganization probably took some months. We hear nothing of imperial military activity between the defeat at Marta and the resumption of the

<sup>55</sup> *Ioh* VI.136–49; Pringle (1981), 36; Modéran (2003a), 631. <sup>56</sup> *Ioh* VI.512–27.

<sup>57</sup> *Ioh* VI.767–73; Luc. *BC* VIII.663–91. On this topos in Latin epic, see Merrills (2017a), 249–51. Biggs (2019) surveys the conventions of riverine battles in epic.

<sup>58</sup> *Ioh* VI.595–604. <sup>59</sup> *Ioh* VII.1–9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ioh* VII.136–9. Lack of walls implied at VII.480–2. Pringle (1981), 202–3, discusses the archaeology of the site.

<sup>61</sup> *Ioh* VII.136–46. Proc. *BV* II.28.48 confirms this.

<sup>62</sup> *Ioh* VII.62–6. Ricinarius advises the gathering of tribes 'from other parts' (*alterna de parte* – VII.64. compare II.140–1. *Adversa de parte*), with the implication that these included laudas.

offensive campaign in the spring of 548. It seems likely that Carcasan (and perhaps also Antalas) were unchallenged in the intervening period, and this may have resulted in widespread devastation across the provinces as Procopius implies, but Corippus remains silent on this. Thereafter, the Syrtic barbarians probably retreated to their winter pastures as they had in previous years, and Antalas to his home territories in southern Byzacium.<sup>63</sup>

The winter of 547/8 saw a further reorganization of the imperial forces. Corippus describes the efforts of the Praetorian Prefect Athanasius to muster military reinforcements, and particularly to organize supply from the capital to the army at Laribus.<sup>64</sup> He presents a stirring montage of civil and military authorities working in tandem in the way originally envisaged by Justinian in 534, and in the manner which had failed so conspicuously in earlier periods:

Weighted wagons groaned on the roads, and the way swarmed with tall camels; iron and bronze clanged together. All of the grain stores were gathered together throughout the plains, and many weapons were weighed out to the Latin men, according to custom.<sup>65</sup>

Equally important was the gathering of Moorish allies, which probably represented the bulk of John's effective fighting force in 548. Although his expeditions of 546 and 547 had some support from local federates, these numbers increased massively in the final year of campaigning, and political relations may also have been formalized at the same time. Corippus states that Cusina brought 30,000 followers to the field in 548 and Ifsidaia a further 100,000, and while these numbers are certainly much too high, they give some indication of the importance of this support. Corippus goes on to state that Iaudas and the Moors of Numidia provided a further 12,000 soldiers, and this in particular was a significant diplomatic accomplishment.<sup>66</sup> A dominant figure in the Aurès region, Iaudas was among the most influential of the Moorish warlords throughout this period: he had supported Stotzas in the early stages of his rebellion, and had backed the coup of Guntharith alongside Cusina and Antalas in 545/6. He may also have taken up arms against John at Antonia Castra in 546, but in 548, he fought alongside the imperial general.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, Procopius and Theophanes date the alliance with Cusina to this period

<sup>63</sup> Modéran (2003a), 631–2. <sup>64</sup> *Iob* VII.199–208.

<sup>65</sup> *Iob* VII.236–9: *plaustra gemunt onerata uis altisque camelis | feruet iter: ferrum resonantia concutit aera. | omnia per latos conuectant horrea campos | armaque multa uiris more expendenda Latinis.*

<sup>66</sup> *Iob* VII.277–8; VIII.126. Partsch (1879), xxviii.

<sup>67</sup> *PLRE* III Iaudas. His political loyalties are discussed by Modéran (2000) and Modéran (2003a), 350–64.

and imply that he had previously remained neutral, but it is possible that his position within the army changed as preparations escalated: Corippus' account implies that he was granted the title of *magister militum* (*uacans*) as a reward for his service.<sup>68</sup> The details of these alliances are otherwise unclear, and the massive numbers Corippus provides are certainly exaggerated, but the importance of the Moorish allies to the imperial effort is not to be doubted. The reference to John's final victory in Jordanes' *Romana* demonstrates the point:

John, for his part, dwelling in Africa with good fortune, having overcome the hostile faction of the Moors with the help of the peaceful Moors, killed seventeen of their leaders on a single day and, with the help of God, obtained peace for the whole of Africa.<sup>69</sup>

This is one of the very few references to the Moors in the extant chronicles, and the only acknowledgement of John's victory: as such, it underscores the imperial recognition of the importance of local allies to the successful resolution of the campaign.

Despite these preparations, the campaigning season of 548 proved challenging. Tensions within the imperial alliance hampered its cohesion from the outset, and these difficulties persisted until almost the end of the campaign. Rivalries between Cusina and Ifisdaias threatened to escalate into open conflict before a Roman officer was able to bring calm, but there is every indication that relations remained frosty thereafter.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, Carcasan and his followers once more entered southern Byzacium in the spring, and Antalas resumed his hostilities elsewhere in the province, perhaps in the region around Thelepte.<sup>71</sup> The two factions reunited and moved north. John's imperial forces first engaged the Moors in the 'Plains of Mammes' (*campis Mamensibus*), in northern Byzacena, and forced them into retreat.<sup>72</sup> The *Iohannis* includes a long and evocative description of the sufferings of both armies during the long chase to the south. Corippus states that the Moors adopted a scorched-earth policy on

<sup>68</sup> *Iob* VII.268; VIII.269–70; Stein (1959), 554; Pringle (1981), 70; Riedlberger (2010), 274; *PLRE* III. Cutzinas. *Iob* VI.267 also gives him the title in 547, which may indicate a promotion after 546 (or could be a retrojection).

<sup>69</sup> Jord. *Rom* 385. tr. Van Nuffelen and Van Hoof. <sup>70</sup> *Iob* VII.242–61.

<sup>71</sup> Modéran (2003a), 631–3, argues that the Moorish coalition in 548 was primarily from the south, on the strength of the ethnographic language deployed in *Iohannis* VI–VIII. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. It nevertheless seems clear that Antalas and the Moors of Byzacium and Numidia had an important role to play.

<sup>72</sup> *Iob* VII.281–5. This was probably close to modern Hr Doumis, to the west of Kairouan. Compare Diehl (1896), 67, n. 5; Pringle (1981), 217; Dodi (1986b), 594.



Antalas' advice, in order to frustrate the imperial army and create supply problems for John, but the reality behind this strategy is difficult to discern.<sup>73</sup> Parching thirst and Saharan winds battered both armies for fifteen days as they made their way towards Iunci and the south-eastern coast of Byzacium.<sup>74</sup>

The final stages of the 548 campaign took place in the south of Byzacium. Carcasan's army initially blockaded Iunci, but a Roman detachment under the tribune Liberatus relieved the city and once more forced the Moors to retreat.<sup>75</sup> John then established a beachhead at the port of Lariscus: this has variously been identified as Iunci or (more persuasively) a fortified harbour at the modern settlement of Es Skira about forty kilometres to the south-west.<sup>76</sup> Corippus implies that John's intention in doing this was to cut off the Moors from resupply and essentially starve them into submission, but as Peter Riedlberger has noted, this scarcely makes sense: the barbarians of the interior cannot have expected support from the sea and had always depended either on requisition from the local population for supply or on their own flocks.<sup>77</sup> It seems likely that the poet was making a virtue of necessity here, recasting John's own need for resupply and his repeated failure to engage the enemy as part of an aggressive strategy. Further unrest within the imperial army compounded these difficulties. This time, tensions seem to have arisen among the infantry contingent of the Roman army, and they were only suppressed by the heavy hand of Cusina and other allied Moors.<sup>78</sup>

Carcasan and Antalas were eventually drawn into battle some way inland from the coast. Corippus identifies this as Campi Catonis – the Fields of Cato – a toponym which is not otherwise known and has not been definitively identified.<sup>79</sup> In all likelihood the climactic battle took place a few miles inland from the coast of Byzacena, perhaps on the Bled Segui plain between Es Skira and Capsa.<sup>80</sup> Again, little can be stated with confidence about the sequence of events on the battlefield. Corippus states

<sup>73</sup> *Ioh* VII.286–309. <sup>74</sup> *Ioh* VII.310–73. <sup>75</sup> *Ioh* VII.439–51. <sup>76</sup> Pringle (1981), 38.

<sup>77</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 211: 'campaigns don't work like games of hide and seek among children' (*Feldzüge funktionieren nicht wie Versteckspiele unter Kindern*).

<sup>78</sup> *Ioh* VIII.149–63. That these tensions were among the infantry is implied by *Ioh* VIII.98–9, where *Dux* Tarasis is the first named officer to act against the mutiny. He is identified as the infantry commander in *Ioh* IV.553–63.

<sup>79</sup> *Ioh* VIII.166. On the name, compare Partsch (1879), xxxvii, n. 214; Nesselrath (1992), 143, n. 234; Riedlberger (2010), 213–14. Modéran (2003a), 630, 633 and 662–3, identifies this as the Battle of Latara, on the strength of the allusion at *Ioh* VIII.229. This toponym is not otherwise known and seems not to have been the location of the battle in any case, as noted by Riedlberger (2010), 252.

<sup>80</sup> I am grateful to David Mattingly for this suggestion. For other suggestions, see Pringle (1981), 207, and compare Riedlberger (2010), 142.



that Carcasan attacked on a Sunday, in the hope that the imperial troops would be at worship, and divided his initial assault between John's Roman troops in the centre and the Moorish contingents on either side.<sup>81</sup> The battle narrative is again conventionalized and is also incomplete – both the Roman order of battle and the final stages of the fighting have been lost. Nevertheless it is clear that Carcasan was killed and the imperial forces were victorious.<sup>82</sup> Procopius states that Antalas survived the conflict, but never regained his privileged status; he may have been removed from Africa. The same passage also reports that Iaudas was made an imperial slave.<sup>83</sup> This contradicts Corippus' testimony that Iaudas was among John's allies, and may represent a simplification (or misunderstanding) on the part of the historian.<sup>84</sup> John marked his victory with a second ceremony in Carthage, and the success was a bright note in a difficult period for the emperor. Procopius acknowledges it as a rare success in Africa, albeit one which left a barren region in its wake.<sup>85</sup>

### The Roman Army on Campaign

The *Iohannis* is a challenging source on the details of the sixth-century army. At times, Corippus provides images of startling clarity of life on campaign and suggests that he drew upon reliable sources: his allusions to the bustling activity within a Roman marching camp or the temporary structures set up for Christian worship in the field are especially vivid.<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere, he seems to have been inspired by contemporary military handbooks: John's instructions on the grazing of cavalry horses and the despatch of patrols could be verse paraphrases of such texts, and again probably reveal the poet's informants.<sup>87</sup> On other matters, including fundamental points of military organization, his account is less transparent. The fluidity with which he uses the terms *agmen*, *cohors* or *numerus* in describing units of different sizes, for example, makes reconstructing the precise structure of John's army challenging. No doubt this resulted in part from the poetic language in which Corippus worked – translating Greek military language into Latin hexameters came at the cost of precision – but the confusion here was not only caused by the metre of his verse: Procopius, John Lydus and the sixth-century laws are often equally

<sup>81</sup> *Ioh* VIII.254–5.    <sup>82</sup> *Ioh* VIII.635–6.    <sup>83</sup> Proc. *BG* IV.17.21.    <sup>84</sup> *Ioh* VII.277–8; VIII.126.

<sup>85</sup> Proc. *BG* IV.17.20–2; Compare *SH* XVIII.7–8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ioh* II.274–87, II.434–70, VIII.325–31 and the discussion in Chapter 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Ioh* VIII.223–4; Riedlberger (2010), 247 notes the parallel with *Strategikon*, 9.3.106–7. And compare Caramico (2015), 149–53.

perplexing on the regimental structures of the Justinianic army.<sup>88</sup> Corippus did work from military sources, though, and took some pride in his use of contemporary argot. As Stefano Costa has shown, details of this kind were part of the reality effect for the poet and lent verisimilitude to his account.<sup>89</sup> In Corippus' eyes – and probably those of many in Carthage – the army was defined above all by its senior officers. Much of his information about the army on campaign probably came from John Troglita and his immediate entourage, and the same group would have been among his immediate audience. As a result, the epic contains a wealth of prosopographical details on the imperial officer corps which is probably trustworthy. The names and (often) ranks of these officers give some sense of the structure of John's three field armies, which would otherwise be lost to us. His is very much a view of military life from the top down (and at one remove), but his testimony is invaluable.

John's personal entourage was at the heart of his field army. This would have included his *consiliarius* Recinarius and his personal staff, as well as his *armigeri* or guards. Reported discussions between John and Recinarius are a key medium for strategic exposition within the *Iohannis*, and while the details were certainly embellished for dramatic effect it is evident that the general's inner circle were crucial to his planning.<sup>90</sup> These *armigeri* were equivalent to the *doruphoroi* and *bucellarii* discussed by Procopius: these were the personal guards or 'biscuit-men', who took their common name from the rations they had once been served and who functioned as an elite guard unit.<sup>91</sup> They had been a common feature of Roman high command since the fourth century, and were prominent in the expeditionary armies of the sixth. Such soldiers typically served with their commander over multiple postings: Recinarius intimates that he had fought alongside the general in both his first tour in Africa and in Persia.<sup>92</sup> They also had a crucial military function. Corippus identifies thirteen *armigeri* by name and gives them a particularly prominent role in

<sup>88</sup> Ravegnani (2005), 185–6, outlines the problems well. Riedlberger (2010), 120–3, notes the further confusion caused by Corippus' epic genre. More generally, see Whatley (2021), 58–9: 'The main culprit is the manifold forms the evidence often takes: classicizing histories, military manuals, inscriptions, legal texts, and papyri. The countless terms for organizational structures have bedevilled attempts at determining whether a term might pertain to one kind of regiment, or any number of different regiments, even if authoritative studies have implied otherwise' (citing Jones (1964), 654–68). Whatley's discussion clarifies much of this confusion considerably.

<sup>89</sup> Costa (2015).

<sup>90</sup> *Ioh.* II.312–56; VI.408–36; VII.50–72; and compare VIII. 180–205 (general council of war).

<sup>91</sup> Zarini (2003), 55. On the *bucellari* in this period, see Lenski (2009), 158–66, and the helpful discussion in Whatley (2021), 115–17.

<sup>92</sup> *Ioh.* II.317–19; VII.25–33. His service on the eastern front is also noted at Proc. *BP.* II.27.24–7.

his stylized battle narratives, as we shall see. The corps may well have been quite large. Procopius states that Belisarius had up to 7,000 *bucellarii*, and while this was exceptional, other commanders may well have had a personal guard of up to 1,000. It is therefore possible that John's guard numbered in the hundreds.<sup>93</sup> The names provided in the *Iohannis* hint at the variety in this retinue. Recinarius was probably a Gothic name, and Solumuth and Ariarith also have Germanic names.<sup>94</sup> Bulmitzis was probably Hunnic in origin and Fiscula may have been a Gepid from the north Balkans, as Peter Riedlberger has argued.<sup>95</sup> Other names are less distinctly regional, although Salusis is plausibly African. This variety may have been unusual – as noted in Chapter 2, generals often depended on personal cliques from similar backgrounds – but shared service may well have achieved the same end.

Outside John's immediate circle, Corippus distinguishes between two ranks of field officers, and here the diversity of the group is again striking. The *duces* were the more senior officers, who either commanded individual regiments (*agmina* in Corippus' poem), and hence represented the leadership of John's army, or held office as provincial military commanders. Some of these individuals also held the title of *magister militum (vacans)*.<sup>96</sup> The *tribuni* were subordinate to the *duces* but could command regiments in the absence of a senior officer, or smaller units (*numeri* or *cohortes*, although the language is inconsistent). Their names indicate that *duces* and *tribuni* alike were drawn from across the empire. The *Dux* Putzintulus, who dies heroically at the end of the epic, seems to have hailed from the Balkans, an origin he shared with Tarasis and Zudius as well as John Troglita himself.<sup>97</sup> Gentius, Geiserith and Fronimuth may have been Vandals or perhaps Goths, and Sinduit is also a Germanic name.<sup>98</sup> *Dux* Gregorius commanded one of the units at Antonia Castra, but may have been a provincial commander in post at the time of John's landing: if this was the case, then he was probably Artabanes' cousin and Armenian in origin.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> See Proc. *BG* III.1.21 on Belisarius' 7,000. Parnell (2017), 18. n. 26, defends the figure, although modern historians have treated it with some scepticism. The same group was probably rather smaller in 533: Proc. *BV* I.11.18–19. *BG* III.27.3 states that Valerian had more than 1,000 in his entourage; Agathias I.19.4–5 says that Narses had about 400 (including non-combatants).

<sup>94</sup> Onesti (2002), 147; Riedlberger (2010b). <sup>95</sup> Riedlberger (2010b), 19, 26.

<sup>96</sup> *Iob* III.42; IV.474 (Gentius). Compare *PLRE* III Gentius.

<sup>97</sup> Riedlberger (2010b) is an excellent discussion of the onomastics, although his inference that this can cast light on specific episodes in battle seems unlikely.

<sup>98</sup> See Riedlberger (2010b) and compare Onesti (2002), 155–6, which identifies Fronimuth and Geiserith as Vandals and notes at 185 that Sinduit could be Gothic or Vandal.

<sup>99</sup> Proc. *BV* II.27.10; *Iob* IV.487–8; *PLRE* III Gregorius 2.

Procopius attests that Rufinus, who served as *Dux Tripolitanae* in early 547, was Lazian.<sup>100</sup> The tribune Liberatus was certainly African, as the narrator states explicitly, and other officers may also have been recruited locally.

### Numbers and Types of Troops

It is generally thought that the army at Antonia Castra in 546 consisted of nine regiments, which Corippus refers to as *agmina* (troops) or sometimes *cohortes*, along with a substantial contingent of allied Moors. The poet describes the army leaving Carthage through nine gates, and this has been taken as an allusion to its constitution, but the more convincing evidence is provided by the order of battle in Book IV.<sup>101</sup> There, he delineates a right wing in five separate commands under Gentius, Putzintulus, Gregorius, Geiserith and Marturius; a left wing under John Senior, Fronimuth and Marcentius; and a unit of infantry under Tarasis in the centre.<sup>102</sup> John himself also took position at the centre, surrounded by his command group and (presumably) his *buccellari*.<sup>103</sup> In Corippus' pleasing conceit, this allowed John to control his units like a musician playing his instrument or a bull brandishing his horns.<sup>104</sup> Allied Moors under Cusina (on the right) and Ifisdaia (on the left) provided further support.<sup>105</sup> While the poet's account of the Roman battle line cannot be read with complete confidence, there is no particular reason to doubt these specifics. Of the different *agmina* Corippus identifies, only one – the unit under Tarasis, who held the centre of the line in all three battles described in the poem – is explicitly identified as an infantry regiment.<sup>106</sup> It is generally assumed that the remainder were cavalry and hence that John's army was primarily mounted, but we lack positive evidence for this.<sup>107</sup> Corippus does allude to armoured heavy cavalry within the Roman army, but these seem to have been in the minority, even among the mounted troops.<sup>108</sup> His account implies that the infantry contingent was particularly impressive at the time of the departure from Carthage and lingers particularly on the scale of

<sup>100</sup> Proc. *BV* II.19.1; *Ioh* VI.221; *PLRE* III Rufinus 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ioh* I.426–7; Vinchesi (1983), 31, notes a possible allusion to Virg. *Aen* VIII.585 on the departure of cavalry through gates, which makes the historical value of this passage suspect.

<sup>102</sup> *Ioh* IV.472–514 (right); 515–52 (left); 553–63 (centre). <sup>103</sup> *Ioh* IV.564–94.

<sup>104</sup> *Ioh* IV.567–82. <sup>105</sup> *Ioh* IV.509–14, 544–52. <sup>106</sup> *Ioh* IV.553–4.

<sup>107</sup> Diehl (1896), 366–7; Pringle (1981), 34–5; Whitby (2021), 198.

<sup>108</sup> Compare Zarini (2003), 87, and Riedlberger (2010), 225–6. The Romans are described as armoured at *Ioh* I.427 and I.443 (referring to *loricae*). Cavalry are *ferreus* or *ferratus* at II.441; IV.493 (Geiserith), IV.536 (Fronimuth). Putzintulus is unarmoured at VIII.493, but the poet regards this as noteworthy (so it may have been exceptional).

Tarasis' unit in the battle line at Antonia Castra.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, the description of the gathering army for the campaign in 547 emphasizes infantry as well as cavalry.<sup>110</sup>

The hierarchy of *duces* and *tribuni* gives a general indication of the size of the different units they led. The *Strategikon*, a Byzantine military manual of the late sixth century, suggests that *moirai* of 2,000–3,000 men would be commanded by a duke and made up of several *tagmas* of 300–400, each led by a count or a tribune.<sup>111</sup> These would be approximately equivalent to the *agmina* and *numeri* of the *Iohannis*, with the equivalent ranks. Partly on the strength of this parallel, and assuming an effective fighting strength somewhat lower than that allowed in the *Strategikon*, Pringle estimated the total size of John's army in 546 at between 9,000 and 18,000, of which 8,000–16,000 were cavalry (the remainder being Tarasis' infantry). John's own *buccellari* and the Moorish allies would be in addition to this.<sup>112</sup> The logic here seems straightforward enough and provides a reassuringly wide margin for error, but the lower end of this scale seems the more plausible. The *Strategikon* suggests that a typical army in this period would be 6,000–15,000 strong, and there is no reason to assume that John's field army was unusually large.<sup>113</sup> Belisarius' original expeditionary force to Africa was 15,000 plus his personal guards, for example.<sup>114</sup> Procopius states that the same general's invasion force in Italy was only 7,000 strong, and the imperial army at Verona in 542 numbered 12,000.<sup>115</sup> While none of these figures is absolutely secure, they do at least provide an order of magnitude for the army of 546.

Most of John's troops were probably drawn from within the Africa garrison. There is no evidence that this ever grew substantially larger than the strength of 15,000 at the time of Belisarius' occupation. While reinforcements had occasionally been sent in times of crisis, other units were also consistently withdrawn, not least during the escalating war in Italy.<sup>116</sup> Nor is there any clear evidence that John brought substantial reinforcements with him: Corippus refers to 100 ships in the expedition of 546. While this may be a poetic conceit, it is unlikely to underestimate

<sup>109</sup> *Ioh* I.428–9; IV.553–63.   <sup>110</sup> *Ioh* VI.265–6.   <sup>111</sup> *Strategikon*, I.3, I.4.

<sup>112</sup> Pringle (1981), 34.

<sup>113</sup> See *Strategikon* III.8, 10, and compare the important comments of Whitby (1995), 89–90 and 101–3. Nicasie (1998), 204–5, notes the particular logistical issues raised by armies much larger than this.

<sup>114</sup> Proc. *BV* I.11.2.

<sup>115</sup> Proc. *BV* I.11.2; *BG* I.5.2–4 (invasion of Italy); *BG* III.3.4 (Verona). Agathias II.4. gives the Italian army in the field as 18,000.

<sup>116</sup> Compare Proc. *BG* I.25.17, I.29.22, II.23.36–9; III.18.26–8. Belisarius had Vandals and Moors in his personal retinue: *BG* III.1.6.

the size of the fleet, which was evidently much smaller than the 500 ships which had carried Belisarius' invasion, and which had represented a major logistical operation for the sixth-century state.<sup>117</sup> The presence of the *Dux Byzacenaë* Marcentius and (perhaps) the *Dux Numidiaë* Gregorius among John's commanders at Antonia Castra implies that the two main provincial armies joined him in the field, and they may have comprised a substantial proportion of his army. Other troops from the existing garrison would certainly have remained at their posts. For these reasons, a fighting strength closer to 10,000 than almost 20,000 seems likely.

John's army was significantly smaller during the second campaign in 547. The order of battle at Marta presents a right wing under the command of Cusina, Fronimuth and John Senior, a left under Putzintulus, Geiserith and Sinduit and a centre again held by Taxis and John himself.<sup>118</sup> If we exclude Cusina, who may have been supernumerary as a Moorish ally (and who may not have been present at the battle at all, if Procopius and Theophanes are correct on the timing of his alliance), this suggests a campaigning army of just six regiments. Five of these remained under the command of the *duces* from the previous year, although their positions in the line changed; the sixth was now under the *dux* Sinduit, who presumably replaced the tribune Marturius. If we assume that the individual *agmina* were the same size as the previous year, this would imply that the army was reduced to about two-thirds of its earlier strength. Joseph Partsch and Charles Diehl suggested that the missing divisions under Gentius, Marcentius and Gregorius had been despatched as a result of the deteriorating situation in Italy, Ernest Stein that they were sent to relieve Septem following the Visigothic attack.<sup>119</sup> Both suggestions seem plausible, although it is equally likely that the reduction simply reflected changed circumstances: what had been a show of force on the part of the new *magister militum* in 546 was a punitive operation far to the south in the following year. Given the likelihood that Antalas and the Moors of Byzacium were not directly engaged in 547, and John's concern to re-establish the secure defence of the African provinces after the victory at Antonia Castra, it seems reasonable to assume that the field army of that year may have been reduced for strategic reasons and that key provincial *duces* – including perhaps Marcentius as *Dux Byzacenaë* – remained at their defensive stations.

<sup>117</sup> *Ioh* I.166; compare Proc. *BV*.I.II.13 (500 ships in 533). <sup>118</sup> *Ioh* VI.512–27.

<sup>119</sup> Partsch (1879), xxix; Diehl (1896), 371; Stein (1959), 561.

The balance of the army changed again in 548. Corippus' emphasis on the reinforcement which took place over the winter of 547/8 implies that the army in the field was larger than it had been the previous year, but the order of battle at Campi Catonis is partly lost in a textual lacuna.<sup>120</sup> The extant part lists five ducal commands – Putzintulus and Geiserith supporting Cusina on one flank, Sinduit, Fronimuth and the ally Ifisdaias on the other.<sup>121</sup> The disposition of Tarasis and the infantry has been lost, although that officer was certainly present at the battle.<sup>122</sup> Corippus' particular emphasis on the size of the allied Moorish contingents implies they represented a significant proportion of the coalition, perhaps larger than in previous years. Although Corippus' total figures of almost 150,000 allies must be greatly exaggerated, these are a reminder of the disproportionate reliance on local Moors for Byzantine strategy. The disagreements between Cusina and Ifisdaias at the outset of the campaign are described by Corippus, who also explains how important their reconciliation was to the imperial effort. The *Iohannis* does suggest, however, that the two leaders were placed in separate camps in the period before the engagement at Campi Catonis, and this may have been to prevent the factional infighting which had only recently been resolved.<sup>123</sup>

The Moorish allies under Cusina, Ifisdaias, Iaudas and Bezina were crucial to John's military capacity, but were equally important to Corippus' presentation of the empire under arms: it was through them that the *parcere subiectis* leitmotiv which underpins the *Iohannis* was played out most directly. Much of the poet's language represents the great mass of Roman fighting men in generic and homogenizing terms: he variously terms them *militēs*, *populi*, *cives* and *Romani*, and this language illustrates the blurring in his poem between the *res publica* and the men who defended it.<sup>124</sup> Much the same point is made in poet's repeated comparison of John's army to a well-ordered hive of bees – an image which obviously alludes directly to the famous passage in Virgil's fourth *Georgic*.<sup>125</sup> But the diversity of the imperial army was also important. John makes precisely this point in his embassy to Antalas in Book II:

Do you think that any peoples have been able to defeat the Roman troops over the centuries? We tame the kingdom of the Parthians, the Lazēs, the

<sup>120</sup> This is the crucial lacuna before *Iob* VIII.370, on which see Riedlberger (2010), 338–40.

<sup>121</sup> *Iob* VIII.370–7. Compare Riedlberger (2010), 339–44.

<sup>122</sup> His presence is noted in the build-up to the battle at *Iob* VIII.98.

<sup>123</sup> *Iob* VII.242–61. Riedlberger (2010), 140.

<sup>124</sup> Compare for example: *Iob* IV. 123; IV. 183; IV.451; VI.624; VIII.51; VIII.192. Riedlberger (2010), 110–11.

<sup>125</sup> *Iob* I.428–37; IV.294–304; VII.335–9. Virg., *Geo.* IV.8–314.



Huns, the Franks and the Getae; all of the savage *gentes* spread across the vast world under the celestial vault serve in our court; under a pious emperor they are happy to have abandoned Mars, they carry out orders and bend their necks to a gentle yoke.<sup>126</sup>

Parthians, Lazi, Huns, Franks and Getae are all represented in one form or another among the polyethnic and polyglot names of John's officer corps, but the Moorish allies themselves drove this message home. The poet consistently distinguishes between the main body of John's army and the great mass of his Moorish allies, but the unity between the two was crucial. Corippus' is clear that Cusina and Ifsdaias were fundamental to John's war effort, but the *Iohannis* also provided a political and cultural framework in which this support could be comprehended.

### Moorish Armies on Campaign and in the Field

If the *Iohannis* is a troubling source for the study of Roman military dispositions, the challenges are still greater when it comes to their Moorish opponents. The difficulty here is often not simply sifting out Corippus' ethnographic chauvinisms – which are easy enough to spot – but recognizing more deep-seated assumptions which modern commentators sometimes share. This is perhaps most obvious when it comes to the central strategic ambitions of Antalas and his allies, which are never directly addressed in the poem and have rarely been considered in detail in modern discussions. Recent studies have justifiably rejected Corippus' implication that rebels were motivated simply by animosity towards specific Roman commanders, an atavistic distrust of settled societies or an insatiable hunger for plunder. Instead, the political ambitions of individual leaders have been scrutinized and their engagement with imperial power viewed in terms of collaboration as much as conflict.<sup>127</sup> Other scholarship has explained Moorish activity in terms of the seasonal rhythms of pastoralist life: the annual movements of transhumants from the pre-desert or mountains into the cultivated zone could create difficulties in periods of social and political upheaval.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> *Iob* II.381–7: *uincere nempe putas quascumque in saecula gentes | Romanas potuisse manus. nos Parthica regna, | nos Lazos, Vnnos, Francosque, Getasque domamus; | quaeque sub aethereo latum sparguntur in orbem | axe ferae gentes, nostris famulantur in aulis, | principe subque pio laeti iam Marte relicto | iussa ferunt suauique iugo sua colla reflectunt.*

<sup>127</sup> Merrills (2021a) (with references).

<sup>128</sup> See Modéran (2003a), 209–88, 620–5, and Merrills (2018), especially 361–9 (with references).



Yet Moorish strategic objectives remain elusive. When the allied forces of Carcasan and Antalas camped outside the unfortified city of Iunci, for example, both Corippus and his Roman protagonists were puzzled at the failure to occupy the city, and modern commentators have sometimes shared this bemusement.<sup>129</sup> For African citizens living in a region defined by its newly built town walls, this may have been understandable – when you feel like a nail, everything looks like a hammer – but there is little evidence that the occupation of cities was ever a strategic priority for Moorish leaders. The Vandals had made little effort to fortify towns against the threat of their neighbours, even when these difficulties escalated in the sixth century. Some cities certainly felt the pressure of neighbouring barbarians – Lepcis Magna is one obvious example, and Procopius also refers to ad hoc defences built at Sullectum – but disputes generally seem to have arisen over the cultivated hinterlands of towns rather than the cities themselves.<sup>130</sup> Hadrumetum was taken by the combined forces of the Moors and the rebels of Stotzas in 544, but this was an unexpected victory after the *Dux Byzacenaë* fell into their hands rather than a strategic priority, and there seems to have been little effort to retain the city thereafter.<sup>131</sup> And while our texts describe Moorish attacks up to the walls of Carthage, the city itself was never overrun, nor was this seriously threatened, even when the gates were deliberately left open.<sup>132</sup> This is not to suggest that Africa was peaceful in this period – it clearly was not – merely that the strategic priorities of an empire built around fortified urban networks were clearly very different from those of some of the local leaders active in the same theatre. In fact, Moorish actions seem to have been focused primarily on taking advantage of periods of upheaval in the hope of winning increased influence in the peace which followed, whether this was through improved relations with neighbouring communities or recognition in the form of imperial office.<sup>133</sup> They did not seek to assault walled towns or occupy them for themselves.

The *Iohannis* is similarly elusive on the size, disposition or organization of the Moorish armies in the field in 546, 547 or 548. Corippus' ethnographic language suggests that the Moorish alliance which fought at Marta in 547 consisted primarily of groups from the Syrtic regions without

<sup>129</sup> *Iob* VII.480–2 (Liberatus states that the preservation of the unwallled town was a miracle), compare Rubin (1995), 56.

<sup>130</sup> Proc. *BV* II.21.13–15 (Lepcis); *BV* I.16.9 (Sullectum). <sup>131</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>132</sup> Proc. *BV* II.26.1–2.

<sup>133</sup> On this, see especially Modéran (2003a), 616–25, and the excellent study of Stachura (2016), especially 640–2.

support from their neighbours in Byzacium or Numidia. The coalitions at Antonia Castra and Campi Catonis did involve groups from the western provinces, and Antalas was among the Moorish leadership in both of these battles, but the precise constitution of these forces is not clear. Corippus often emphasizes the chaotic otherness of his barbarian antagonists, particularly in contrast to the ordered discipline of the Roman troops, but elsewhere he presents the Moorish combatants in terms that are virtually indistinguishable from their opponents. His cursory orders of battle for the Moorish armies give some sense of a regimental structure in the field, and it is perhaps not surprising that a leader who had been in imperial service for a decade would have adopted Roman tactics. In describing the dispositions of the troops, however, the conventions of Latin epic are clearly paramount:

In a similar fashion, Antalas skilfully directed the fight and advanced surrounded by the wings of his army. Confident on his horse in the middle of things, he prepared his infantry phalanxes for the fight, linked together by their heavy shields. But he kept the units close to protect the camp and did not want his unlucky infantry to risk fighting further afield, having experienced on so many occasions what terror and Roman courage can do in combat.<sup>134</sup>

These interlocked shields directly parallel the similar preparations of the Roman infantry under Tarasis, which themselves recall the language of Virgil and perhaps an older epic tradition.<sup>135</sup> Corippus' allusions to the discussions of the Moorish field command have similar parallels to that on the Roman side. Whether this was an invention of the poet's, a simplification on the part of his informers or a reflection of the generic demands of his composition, it can hardly be used uncritically as evidence for the organization of the Moorish coalition.

We face similar issues with Corippus' account of the equipment and fighting style adopted by Moorish groups. In reality, these probably varied greatly. The coalitions of 546, 547 and 548 certainly included mounted elements, although there are also references to Moors fighting on foot.<sup>136</sup> Corippus only ever refers to horses, and not to camels, as cavalry mounts in

<sup>134</sup> *Ioh* IV. 619–26: *Antalas pariter pugnas determinat arte | egrediturque suis uallatus cornibus. ardet | in medium confisus equo, pugnaeque pedestri | composuit solido iunctas umbone phalanges. | sed proprius tenuit munitis agmina castris | nec pedites uoluit tristes committere pugnas | longius, expertus totiens quid terror in armis | et uirtus Romana potest.*

<sup>135</sup> Compare *Ioh* IV.553–63. Cazzaniga (1971), 276–8, detects Ennian as well as Virgilian echoes in the Tarasius passage. On both, see Baldwin (1988), 177–8.

<sup>136</sup> *Ioh* IV.618–22.

combat.<sup>137</sup> While camels do sometimes signify Moorish barbarism within the poem, they were only ever used as pack animals on campaign, and were clearly widely used by both sides.<sup>138</sup> References to Moorish arms and armour are similarly elusive (and allusive). Corippus implies that most Moors were unarmoured, although shields are relatively commonplace within the poem. Corippus twice refers to these shields as *caetrae*, which seem to have been the small round bucklers widely associated with North African cavalry in the Roman period, and which frequently appear on funerary stelae.<sup>139</sup> Elsewhere, Corippus simply uses *clipaea*, a more generic term also used to refer to Roman shields.<sup>140</sup> Procopius is explicit that throwing spears were the principal offensive weapons of the Moors, and other evidence supports this.<sup>141</sup> Funerary reliefs on stelae commonly depict African cavalry carrying pairs of spears. Corippus twice alludes to this practice in the catalogue of Book II.<sup>142</sup> As Vincent Zarini has noted, paired javelins were also a commonplace in classical epic, which rather compromises Corippus' value as a historical source, but the correspondence with our other evidence remains noteworthy.<sup>143</sup> There is no specific reference in the poem to Moorish archers, beyond battlefield *topoi* about the exchange of arrows.<sup>144</sup> Moors are equipped with swords in the catalogue, and the battle sequences occasionally include references to these weapons or to slashing wounds inflicted by the barbarians, but spears (*teli* and *lanceae*) appear much more frequently.<sup>145</sup>

The *Iohannis* inspires more confidence as a source on Moorish tactics, at least as they appeared to the imperial military and to observers from Carthage. At the end of Book I, and again at the start of Book VIII, John

<sup>137</sup> The partial exception is *Ioh* VI.194. This need not imply that camels were ridden in combat, since the passage relates to Moorish pastoralism more broadly. Contra Riedmüller (1919), 30. On animals in the epic, see Zarini (1998).

<sup>138</sup> *Ioh* VII.236 (Roman camels).

<sup>139</sup> *Ioh*. II.153 and VIII.191. Compare *Virg. Aen.* VII.732; *Serv. Ad. Aen.* 7.732 *caetra est scutum loreum, quo utuntur Afri et Hispani*. And compare *caetrati* in *Not. Dig. Occ.* 5.84 and 7.56. *Proc. BV* II.ii.26. Riedlberger (2010), 228–9.

<sup>140</sup> See for example *Ioh* II.114, V.362. The term is also used to refer to Persian shields at I.93.

<sup>141</sup> Koehn (2018), 134–7, surveys the evidence and argues that John's troops adopted similar weapons in response.

<sup>142</sup> *Ioh* II.133, II.151, VIII.194 and compare *Proc. BV* II.ii.27. Compare *Camps, Chaker and Laporte* (1999).

<sup>143</sup> Zarini (1997), 176. Thus: *Virg. Aen.* I.313, XII.165 and *Hom. Il.* III.18 and XII.298.

<sup>144</sup> *Partsch* (1896), 30. *Topoi: Ioh* V.102–3 and see note 179.

<sup>145</sup> *Pilumla* is used fourteen times in the *Iohannis*, but only ever refers to Roman weapons. Moorish swords (or references to slashing wounds): *Ioh* II.126–9, 154, *Ioh* V.54, 199, 254–6, 382, 506. As Schinder (2007), 185, notes, Roman deaths are generally attributed to ranged weapons in the *Iohannis*, rather than to swords. On Corippus' accounts of Moorish spears, see also Koehn (2018), 136, n. 412.

Troglita explains in direct speech the trickery and deception the North Africans adopted on the battlefield. His survey of feints and counter-attacks, as well as ambushes in enclosed spaces, recalls many of the tropes of treacherous barbarian fighting in classical accounts of irregular warfare, and anticipates the outlines of different regions' fighting styles in later Byzantine military handbooks.<sup>146</sup> Perhaps more important, this also anticipates the battles that follow in the pages of the *Iohannis*: the speech reveals John as a thoughtful and prescient battlefield tactician. Corippus and Procopius both imply that the Moors preferred a disruptive approach in the field, avoiding direct engagement where possible and making the most of their own mobility and familiarity with the terrain.<sup>147</sup> Whether this was true of all 'Moors' may be doubted – the majority of John's own army seems to have been made up of Moorish federates in 548, as we have seen, and Corippus presents them fighting loyally in the Roman fashion – but this fitted imperial understanding well.

The most noteworthy feature of Moorish fighting to sixth-century commentators was the circling of camels, cattle and other herd animals which then formed an impromptu but effective defensive enclosure. This is presented as a defining feature of the Syrtic barbarians in the catalogue of Book II:

The warlike Austur, wary of joining an uncertain battle in the open field, creates walls and ditches by tying camels together, and places his mixed flock in a tight protective crown, so that he can entangle the attacking enemies and crush them when they get lost. Then, springing forward, the savage Ilguas kills the troops that are trapped in these ramparts, and safely takes possession of the field . . . They use the ram as a machine in their unspeakable wars and set up their tents in good order, having arranged their standards.<sup>148</sup>

The strategy recurs repeatedly in the *Iohannis*. Corippus describes the circling of camels and other herd animals before the battle at Antonia Castra, and later the brutality of the Roman slaughter when they penetrate this perimeter.<sup>149</sup> In Book VIII, Carcasan and Antalas adopt the same approach when threatened – a pointed contrast to the ordered Roman

<sup>146</sup> *Iob* I.522–78; VIII.14–32.      <sup>147</sup> Proc. BV II.8.21–2, 10.7–12.

<sup>148</sup> *Iob* II.91–8, 100–1: *nam belliger Austur, | sollicitus dubias campis committere pugnas, | collocat astricitis muros fossasque camelis | atque pecus uarium densa uallante corona | ponit, ut obicibus pugnantes implicet hostes | ambiguosque premat. currens tunc saeuus Ilguas | mactat in angustis prosternens agmina muris | et campos securus adit, . . . est aries illis infandi machina belli, | comptaque dispositis ponunt tentoria signis . . .*

<sup>149</sup> *Iob* IV.595–618; V.421–438.

camp of their opponents.<sup>150</sup> Significantly, Procopius also refers to the same practice twice, once in his description of the Tripolitanian Moor Cabaon in his conflict with the Vandals in the early sixth century, the other in recalling the struggles of various Numidian and Byzacenian leaders (including Cusina) against the imperial army of Solomon in 535.<sup>151</sup>

Corippus' references to this Moorish tactic illustrate very well the elusiveness of the *Iohannis* as a historical source. On the one hand, the corroboration from Procopius suggests that this practice was genuinely used in the African wars of the sixth century; there is no direct parallel in the epic tradition, and Corippus presumably drew upon his military informants here rather than his reading.<sup>152</sup> The circling of horses, chariots and support wagons as a defensive measure was more or less universal in the ancient world, and was readily adopted by the Byzantines when the need arose, as other parts of Procopius' account show.<sup>153</sup> Yet the repeated references in the *Vandal War* are also a reminder that this was an acknowledged feature of Moorish fighting among the cognoscenti in Carthage, and Corippus drew upon this recognition in crafting his own work. This is clearly demonstrated in John's flying boasts to Antalas towards the end of book II, in which he mocks the fragility of the barbarian defences:

Round up your bleating flocks, and pregnant she-goats, and your bucks that clamour in the middle of them with their scowling faces. We do not need to bring up a ram to scatter these hollow towers; rather we will expose our enemy by leading his away. Your ram will be seized from among his sheep, and we shall dine well upon your plundered walls.<sup>154</sup>

John's punning reference to *aries* as both siege engine and animal, first brought up (*adducto*) and then taken away (*abducto*), depends on the familiarity of this Moorish tactic for the joke to land.<sup>155</sup> After all, boasting that you are intend to *eat* your enemies' defences only really works when it is generally known that these 'walls' were made up of livestock. There is

<sup>150</sup> *Iob* VIII.36–40.

<sup>151</sup> Proc. *BV* I.8.25–8, II.11.17. Discussion of the tactic: Partsch (1896), 33; Diehl (1896), 59–61; Riedmüller (1919), 29–30.

<sup>152</sup> There is some parallel with Herodotus' account of Cyrus' use of camels at Hdt.I.80, but as Haury (1896), 7–9, notes, this is not exact and there is no particular reason to doubt Procopius' account here, contra Sjöström (1993), 38.

<sup>153</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 137–8. Compare Proc. *BG* II.5.3; II.7.2.

<sup>154</sup> *Iob* II.398–403: *balantum compone greges fetasque capellas | et toruis medios clamantes uultibus hircos. | non ariete cauas adducto spargere turres | est opus. abducto potius nudabimus hostes, | inter ouesque tuas aries praedabitur omnis, | et bene direptos ponemus prandia muros.*

<sup>155</sup> Zarini (1997), 242–3; Tandoi (1980), 61–2; Diehl (1896), 60, n.3., is less amused and regards John's boast as 'intolérable jeux d'esprit'.

also a deliberate slippage between the Moorish women and children and the sheep, goats and bucks sheltered alongside them within the defensive perimeter.<sup>156</sup> This was underscored in the Roman slaughter following the penetration of the camp later in the battle. Elsewhere, Corippus compares the fortified Moorish camp to the Labyrinth, and hence emphasizes both the fiendish otherness of the African barbarians and John's heroism in navigating and overcoming this half-human, half-bestial stronghold.<sup>157</sup>

As a source on early Byzantine military activity in North Africa, the *Iohannis* is an invaluable counterpoint to Procopius' *Vandal Wars*, albeit one shaped by a different set of generic expectations. The nature of Corippus' sources, and the immediate audience for his epic – which would certainly have been dominated by active servicemen in both cases – suggest that his narrative of the campaigns between 546 and 548 is probably essentially trustworthy, but is much less detailed than we would like, particularly for the catastrophe of 547. Certainly, it is hard to see why he would have invented the episodes that he did include, even if some difficult moments were passed over swiftly (or even omitted entirely). The *Iohannis* offers some tantalizing specifics on these short campaigns, but there remain several important details which we cannot reconstruct.

### Fighting and Battles in the *Iohannis*

The second half of the *Iohannis* is dominated by three extended descriptions of battles – of the Roman victory at Antonia Castra (Book V), the defeat at Marta (Book VI) and the final victory at Campi Catonis (Book VIII). These passages are dominated in turn by extended sequences of individual combat, which are highly stylized and shocking in their violence. They are also frequently somewhat difficult to follow. Shorter accounts of mass combat, often coloured by extended metaphors, provide a context for these episodes, as do authorial interjections and expository speeches by the principal commanders. These shifts between individual heroic action and a wider panorama give the audience some sense of the unfolding drama on the battlefield and are largely conventional: they had been a constitutive feature of classical epic since the *Iliad*, and had been systematically developed by Virgil and his successors.<sup>158</sup> The result is an image of battle that frequently seems absurd

<sup>156</sup> Zarini (1998) for extended discussion. <sup>157</sup> *Ioh* IV.606–7.

<sup>158</sup> Miniconi (1951); Fenik (1968) are classic studies of epic battle scenes. Fuhrmann (1968) discusses the function of grotesque violence in classical epic. For a fine recent overview, see the collected essays in Reitz and Finkelmann (2019), especially II Part 1. Schindler (2007) discusses Corippus' inheritance of this tradition.

from a purely historical perspective: John Troglita, for example, is personally credited with the killing of forty-seven named Moors over the course of the three battles (as well as two horses and a camel); his adjutant Ricinarius kills another seventeen, and his *armigero* account for many more. Conversely, the movements of troops across the battlefield are rendered only impressionistically. The result is a series of fantastic sketches which place the historical value of these parts of the *Iohannis* in considerable doubt. Although occasional attempts have been made to piece together the principal episodes of each battle from Corippus' accounts, and even to infer points of detail about Roman or Moorish fighting, such exercises are clearly fraught with difficulty.<sup>159</sup> Here, more than anywhere else, Corippus presents the events of the recent past through the thick distorting lenses of epic convention.

Heavily stylized as they may be, these sequences are nevertheless vital to the structure of the *Iohannis*, and some reflection on their wider cultural resonance certainly seems worthwhile. In the final three books of the *Iohannis*, Corippus devotes around 1,000 lines to detailed descriptions of fighting, and it is likely that several hundred more have been lost from Book VIII.<sup>160</sup> If we add to these the shorter descriptions of Antalas' victory over Hildimer and the defeat of Solomon at Cillium in Book III, the longer account of the Battle of Thacia in Book IV, and perhaps also Liberatus' nocturnal mission to Iunci in Book VII, the importance of these sequences to the structure of the epic is apparent.<sup>161</sup> In total, fighting sequences comprise well over twenty percent of the total length of the *Iohannis*. They provide crucial moments of dramatic tensions in Liberatus' analepsis, the narrative climax to the first act (in Book V), and the epic as a whole (in Book VIII). They may not tell us very much about the realities of combat on the ground in the 540s, but they do allow us to reflect on how it was perceived and rationalized by contemporaries, and this is important in its own right.

In emphasizing bloodshed, wounds and the grim reality of combat, Corippus drew in part upon contemporary taste. As recent scholarship has noted, vivid descriptions of violent combat became more common in late antiquity than in earlier periods.<sup>162</sup> Ammianus, for example, is frequently more graphic in his treatment of fighting than his prose

<sup>159</sup> Diehl (1896), 370–1, 378–9; Richardot (2009), 147–155; Breccia (2008), 76–8; Riedlberger (2010b), 256, infers an eastern unit from the appearance of two names in an *aristeia*. Compare also Pringle (1981), 35–39, but note the comment at 35 (on Corippus' account of Antonia Castra): 'it is impossible . . . to achieve any understanding of its tactical development'.

<sup>160</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 451–55; Mantke (1990). <sup>161</sup> *Ioh* III.198–261; III.401–448; IV.102–218.

<sup>162</sup> See especially Rance (2019), 179–81.



predecessors, and may have adopted certain Virgilian tropes for effect.<sup>163</sup> A similar aesthetic shift has been detected in the work of Procopius, whose frequent lurches into the macabre – especially in his account of the Gothic war in Italy – have variously been attributed to his concern to emphasize the suffering of the combatants, Homeric literary affectation, or his use of citations for bravery as source material.<sup>164</sup> Conspicuously, the same sensibility is less marked in contemporary poetry. Stylized fighting sequences in a Homeric mode were a commonplace in earlier Latin epic but few late antique poets had engaged with this tradition directly, and Corippus' adoption of the form at such length was certainly unusual. Brief echoes of this classical tradition may be heard in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and certain sections of Avitus' biblical poetry, but were not otherwise widely adopted.<sup>165</sup> Quintus of Smyrna includes a short (and bloody) combat sequence in his *Posthomericæ*, but the epic is scarcely dominated by such episodes.<sup>166</sup> The fragments of the anonymous *Blemyomachia* of c.400 also include three scenes of fighting, but it is hard to know how central these were to the poem as a whole.<sup>167</sup> Conspicuously, Claudian eschews this mode entirely in his writing, and this does not seem to have been an element of Virgilian poetics which particularly interested other late Antique writers in Latin.

In adopting this 'traditional' form, then, Corippus worked in a poetic mode that was unusual in the writing of his time, and his decision would have been all the more remarkable for framing very recent combat in this way. Nor was this simply a passive adherence to form. Although *topoi* and literary formulae are widespread throughout these passages, Corippus used detailed accounts of battle to demonstrate his own poetic virtuosity. Descriptions of battle had always been a way in which poets marked their own literary skill, and Corippus continued this tradition, even within the constraints of the form.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Rance (2019), 179, and Gavin Kelly (2008), 22, on a possible allusion to Virg. *Aen* IX.749–756 at Amm Mar. 31.7.12.

<sup>164</sup> Rance (2022), 115: '... while an aesthetic shift towards depicting unusual and macabre combat injuries may be detected in late antique literature, Procopius stands out for the frequency and anatomical precision of his descriptions of wounds, mortal and minor, and consequent surgical procedures' and Kaegi (1990), 72–3. On different approaches, see Lee (2020), 262, n.12, discussing Shaw (1999), 132–3 (empathy); Whately (2016), 161–8 (Homeric affectation) and Colvin (2013), 590–2 (use of battle reports). I am grateful to Doug Lee for advice on this point.

<sup>165</sup> Prudentius, *Psych. Passim*; Avitus, *Carm.* V.558–697. On which see M Roberts (1985), 209–10; idem (1983).

<sup>166</sup> Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomericæ* 8.310–323, tr. James (2007), 143.

<sup>167</sup> Steinrück (1999), fr 12–14; Livrea (1978), 36 and 59–60. <sup>168</sup> Caramico (2015).



In writing battle narratives in an epic mode, Corippus drenched the *Iohannis* in blood. This aesthetic lent his heroes the swaggering glamour of the poetic tradition, but it also had a political function. As we have seen, the *Iohannis* was written in the aftermath of a period of political and military confusion: the preceding decade had been beset by mutiny and civil war in which few loyalties were assured, the imperial army in North Africa continued to be dependent upon capricious local alliances in order to function, and the various Moorish groups in arms defied straightforward categorization. The stylized combat sequences of epic offered a dramatic solution to this problem. Corippus' hyper-literary – and hyper-violent – framing of battle literally cuts through such ambiguities and renders political and social anxieties irrelevant. Through such sequences, the uncertain allies and ill-defined enemies at the start of John's campaigns are bloodily sorted into two, leaving combatants either victorious and whole, or rendered abject through physical dismemberment. The way in which this combat was performed also revealed the finality of this fighting. These were epic battles which brought with them epic closure, not least through the anticipated triumphs to come. As we shall see, the anxieties of civil conflict which mark the earlier battles in the *Iohannis* disappear at its denouement. Political clarity comes through fighting alone.

#### *The Parts of Corippus' Battle Accounts*

There is no correct way to describe a battle, and any representation must defer to convention in some way. This was true of ancient prose historiography, which presented fighting according to well defined rhetorical rules, and is no less true of the modern scholarly apparatus of battlefield maps or textual glosses, or indeed of the first-hand reports of participants in combat.<sup>169</sup> Battles are made up of an almost infinite array of perspectives and experiences, which no single frame could encompass. While certain modes of presentation assume an impartiality through their use of well-established forms, no account in any medium could encompass a battle as it was experienced simultaneously by a confused general, a wounded soldier on the front line or a camp follower. Modern cinematic representations of battles illustrate the impossibility of this task quite well, and also the conventionalized nature of responses to it. Panoramic establishing shots reveal the scale of fighting, detailed vignettes

<sup>169</sup> Keegan (1976) was central in the exploration of this point in the writing of military history. Lee (2007), 126–8, outlines the impact on the study of ancient warfare. Whatley (2016), 1–37, provides an excellent recent interrogation, especially as it pertains to Procopius. See Piette (2009) on literary anxiety in war writing more broadly.

illustrate the suffering on the front lines and a repertoire of zooms, pans and jump cuts establish the relations between these different scales of representation. Scholars have sometimes adopted cinematic metaphors in discussions of epic accounts of battle, and the approaches of the classical poets often anticipate later media quite closely. They talk of visual shifts into specific parts of the battlefield, panning shots, cross-cutting between moments of fighting, between named ‘stars’ and anonymous ‘extras’.<sup>170</sup> Corippus adopted many of these techniques in his treatment of the battles of Antonia Castra and Campi Catonis in particular. They are somewhat less apparent in his account of the defeat at Marta, which he evidently wished to pass over more swiftly, but the contrast here is also important.

Corippus’ references to battlefield topography are typical of this exploitation of the epic repertoire. As we have seen, historians have conventionally identified the locations of the battles at Antonia Castra, Marta and Campi Catonis from toponyms within the *Iohannis*, but Corippus never describes any battlefield in enough detail to allow it to be located with confidence on the ground: most seem to take place on featureless plains.<sup>171</sup> Where details are included – as they are in the description of the ravine in which Antalas defeated Hildimer in Book III – these seem to have been drawn from Virgil rather than from life.<sup>172</sup> Antonia Castra is not described at all, beyond some hints of surrounding mountains which allow the command groups a view of proceedings, and much the same is true of Campi Catonis. The battlefield at Marta is split by a river or dried wadi bed, which may help locate it to the north of the Djebel Matmata, but river battles were a common feature of ancient epic and Corippus’ subsequent narrative follows this precedent closely.<sup>173</sup> Combined with the formulaic accounts of the fighting, the effect of this is to render all of the battles in the poem as somewhat abstracted and unreal. This is a long way from the conventions of historiography or a simple versification of contemporary battle reports.

Connecting specific moments of heroism or tragedy to the wider rhythms of the battle was a challenge for Corippus, as it had been for the epic poets who came before him.<sup>174</sup> As we might expect, many of the solutions that he

<sup>170</sup> See especially van Wees (1997), 673–4, and Telg genannt Kortmann (2019), 111–12.

<sup>171</sup> Lassère (1984), 166, argues that this was a deliberate evocation of the featureless plains of Byzacena.

<sup>172</sup> *Iob* III.219–61. Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 188, notes the echoes from *Aeneid* XI and VI and sees this description as overwhelmingly literary.

<sup>173</sup> Lassère (1984), 166–7, is more optimistic that Corippus drew this from life. and compare Zarini (2003b), 144–8.

<sup>174</sup> Compare Reitz and Finkelmann (2019) for a recent overview.

adopted followed this precedent. The battles of Books V and VI open with descriptions of the armies facing one another, and we can probably assume that a similar opening has been lost in the lacuna in Book VIII.<sup>175</sup> This grand perspective was then complemented by dramatic details which set the scene in motion. In the moments before the fighting at Antonia Castra, a sacred bull is released, which charges towards the Roman lines and eventually turns back to the Moorish side: its death marks the start of the battle proper.<sup>176</sup> The episode is unique to Corippus' poem and certainly drew upon received knowledge about Moorish religion as we shall see in Chapter 6, but the structural principle was not: the heroic posturing of individual figures prior to combat was an established trope, and in many epics single combat sets the scene for the greater struggle to come.<sup>177</sup> Commonplaces also abound in the descriptions that follow. In each of his three long battle narratives, Corippus presents the clash of armies, the sky blotted out by dust, arrows or spears and the earth turned claggy with blood.<sup>178</sup> The sounds of battle echo throughout each passage, and the poet takes particular pains to render the sparkle of weapons and armour against the darkness of battle.<sup>179</sup> The image of bloodied Roman swords, spears and arrows is also a favourite of the poet's, and recurs multiple times throughout the poem.<sup>180</sup> The scale of the fighting is emphasized by repeated comparisons to tempests, hailstorms and forest fires, and its significance underscored through direct comparison to the Gigantomachy and the siege of Troy.<sup>181</sup> All of these passages draw very consciously upon earlier poetic inspiration.

Direct speeches are the most common strategy by which the poet establishes the events taking place on the battlefield. Leaders' speeches allow Corippus to gloss events as they take place and to attribute changing fortunes to the direct intervention of the heroic commanders themselves.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>175</sup> *Iob* VIII.369. Riedlberger (2010), 338–40. <sup>176</sup> *Iob* V.22–31. <sup>177</sup> Littlewood (2019), 80–2.

<sup>178</sup> *Iob* V.54; 353–65; VIII.453–4 (pressed bodies and clashes of arms); V.51–60, 102–3, 184–5; VI.610–11, 633–4, 666–7, 734–5; VIII.386–7, 449–52 (sky darkened by arrows, spears and/or dust); V.63–6, 366–8 (earth claggy with blood). On these epic *topoi*, see especially Telg genannt Kortmann (2019).

<sup>179</sup> *Iob* V.35–49, 86–7, 240–1, 398–9, 426–8, 471–82; VI.563–4, 605, 635–6, 736–7; VIII.381–3, 547–8 (sounds of battle); *Iob* V.208, 260, 462, 483; VI.631–2, 656–7; VIII.593–4 (sparkling weapons and armour).

<sup>180</sup> *Iob* V.405, 449, 478–9, 517–18; VIII.519–20, 522–3, 525–6, 633–4.

<sup>181</sup> Thus: *Iob* V.45–9 (earthquake); V.186–92, 395–7, VIII.513–17 (storms); VIII.69–75 (fire). John is compared to a scythe-wielding harvester at *Iob* VIII.534–40 and several Roman combatants are described as lions: *Iob* V.232–5, 443–5, VI.645–8, 745–8 and one as a tigress: VI.713–18. Mythological analogies appear at V.155–8 (Gigantomachy and Troy); V.304 (Troy); V.395–7 and VI.658–60 (Jupiter and Gigantomachy).

<sup>182</sup> Costa (2015) is a thorough discussion of the topic and notes the manifold classical influences.

John successively rallies his troops, provides commentary on the bloodshed around him and prompts the sack of the Moorish camp in Book V; he explains the misfortune at Marta as the will of God in Book VI, and narrates his reinforcement of Cusina in Book VIII.<sup>183</sup> Bruten is given a speech to rally his army in Book V, and Cusina the allied Moors in the final book, but other leaders are granted speech only in their final moments.<sup>184</sup>

#### *Aristeia: Individual Combat Sequences*

Since the *Iliad*, sequences of individual heroic combat had been common in many epic depictions of battle, and they are focal in Books V and VIII of the *Iohannis*.<sup>185</sup> These sequences are known as *aristeiai* (Lat. *aristeiae*) and typically consist of a hero killing a succession of opponents as a demonstration of his heroic pre-eminence. The victims of these rampages are always named, and they are commonly despatched in a variety of different ways, as an illustration of the martial skill of the hero, but also creativity of the poet. The *Iliad* was the paradigm of the form, where the descriptions of the wounds inflicted by heroes are so detailed that several modern commentators assumed that the poet must have been a battlefield surgeon or at least have observed dissection at first hand.<sup>186</sup> Latin epicists later developed the tradition substantially with the result that first-century *aristeiae* are sometimes almost cartoonish in their violence. As several commentators have noted, this literary escalation provided a setting for poetic virtuosity, and Corippus gleefully extended this tradition. Not only does he accord *aristeiae* an unusually prominent place within his poem, but he also adds some gruesome innovations of his own.<sup>187</sup>

Accounts of sequential fighting are central to the *Iohannis*. As we might expect, John Troglita is by far the dominant figure and is the subject of four separate *aristeiae* (two in each of the battles the poet describes in detail). The first comes at the start of the fighting in Book V and gives some sense of Corippus' succinct (but cinematic) approach to the form. The breathless sequence is best illustrated in full:

First, our general sent Mantisynan into the shadows, slicing off his head with his sword. The throat of the great man did not feel the sharp cut, and

<sup>183</sup> *Iob* V.88–98, 141–6, 404–21; VI.621–30; VIII.462–71. Costa (2015), 143–4.

<sup>184</sup> See *Iob* V.166–82; VIII.432–9, although Cusina's Roman affiliations are stressed here.

<sup>185</sup> On the epic background, see especially Fenik (1968); Foucher (1997); Dinter (2019); Stocks (2019).

<sup>186</sup> Most (1992), 396 (with references).

<sup>187</sup> Most (1992); Foucher (1997); Stocks (2019), 58–73. Schindler (2009), 264, notes that Corippus places a much greater emphasis on *aristeiae* than we find in earlier accounts.

the blade, not slow in the bones, was not tainted with blood. The head lay on the grass with its eyes open. His horse was swift across the plain, still bearing the headless body, glistening with blood where the neck had been severed. Then he struck Laumasan through the temples with his powerful weapon, and with bones broken, the sword went through the soft brain. Cutting through the helmet and cloak, he severed brow, eyes and his long hair all together. He took out the quick horse of Guarsutia with a spear thrown in close combat. The spear trembled in its left flank, and, penetrating both the horse's entrails and its master's right foot with its hot iron, it hung there, hooked. The wounded horse collapsed, crushing its master in its fall and killing him with a deadly weight. He split Manzerasen in two with his unyielding sword, and the body parted to either side, falling in two halves. He sliced the neck of Iartus and the hand that bore his weapon.<sup>188</sup>

The sequential killing of named individuals is typical of the form, particularly given the emphasis on the weapons used and the variety of the wounds suffered. Corippus' own ingenuity is apparent in the account of the exactly bifurcated corpse of Manzerasen, a horror which partly recalls the cleaving of Pandarus' head in *Aeneid* IX, but extends the wound (and image) further.<sup>189</sup>

A similar approach is adopted in John's second *aristeia* of Book V. Here, he kills just four named Moors before his *armigeri* join him to kill five more.<sup>190</sup> Book VIII includes two further sequences for John, which allow the poet further space for narrative creativity. Halfway through the first of these, two deaths are connected rather than presented as discrete events; this too was a common quirk of epic combat:

Immediately he turned to Ifnaten, and – just as he turned to flee – struck him with his long spear from behind, in the spot where the rider's spine held his curved ribs together with the force of his vertebrae. As he received the spear and was frantically trying to pull out the weapon stuck in his bones,

<sup>188</sup> *Ioh* V.104–23: *Mantisyan primum ductor transmisit ad umbras, | ense caput rapiens. nec sensit uulnus acerbum | magna uiri ceruix, nec tardus in ossibus ensis | sanguine tinctus erat. iacuit per gramina uertex | luminibus patulis. truncum leuis aequore portans | currit equus, sanguisque micat quo colla metuntur. | Laumasan inde ferit ualido per tempora ferro, | ossibus et fractis pariter per molle cerebrum | ensis abijt, galeamque simul pallamque secutus | luminaque et longos secuit cum fronte capillos. | Guarsutiaque leuem coniecta comminus basta | fundit equum. laeum tremuit confixa sub armo | fracinus et calido currens per uiscera ferro | perque pedem dextrum domini conserta pependit. | corruit ob uulnus sonipes dominumque ruina | comprimit ipse sua et letali pondere quassat. | Manzerasen medium rigido mucrone tremendus | diuidit, inque latus gemina defluxit utrumque | parte cadens. iugulum rapiens deiecit Iarti | armatumque manum.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ioh* V.120–1 and compare V.253–6. Compare Virg. *Aen.* IX.754–5, developing in turn Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.103–4. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for this parallel. On this image in the *Iohannis*, see especially Caramico (2015).

<sup>190</sup> *Ioh* V.279–84.

struggling for a long time, behold how proud Mirmidonis came forward and prepared to launch his own trembling spear. But [John] seized the dying man's missile and hurled it with all his might, driving it right through the enemy and striking his heart with his new shaft.<sup>191</sup>

John is pre-eminent in Corippus' battles, but other Roman commanders also have their time in the spotlight, particularly those from his inner circle. Ricinarius has a short *aristeia* in Book V and a second in book VIII.<sup>192</sup> One *armiger*, Solomuth, kills five Moors and severs the left hand of another in Book V; he kills two more in Book VIII.<sup>193</sup> Bulmitzis despatches five barbarians in Book V and another two in Book VIII.<sup>194</sup> Ziper has six victims in the first battle and 'gave death in many forms'; he is also accorded a prominent role and a heroic death in the description of the Battle of Marta in Book VI.<sup>195</sup> Other *armigeri* are also credited with named victories and this is one of the primary means by which the general's entourage are distinguished within the poem.<sup>196</sup> Of the regimental commanders, only Putzintulus is given an extended sequence of his own, which precedes his death in Book VIII.<sup>197</sup> A *tribunus* called Marcianus, apparently one of the senior officers in one unit, fulfils a similar function in Book V and is killed by Antalas after taking five victims.<sup>198</sup>

Other *armigeri* and *duces* do appear in the narratives that follow, and are sometimes connected with specific victims, but are not granted full *aristeiae*. Instead, Corippus celebrates their bravery with extended similes, makes generalized statements of their courage in battle or includes them in chains of paired combats. These were all established tropes of epic battle sequences and were one of the ways in which poets shifted focus between individual moments of combat and the wider picture of fighting across the battlefield.<sup>199</sup> Many of these passages are presented as discrete sequences, but they are occasionally connected causally, as we see with the chained fighting of the *armigeri* in Book V:

Dorotis transfixed feathered Antifan with an arrow. Immediately, that mighty hero bent his curved bow, and took out strong Maggite by firing off another arrow. Falling, he tumbled to the ground, but the arrow

<sup>191</sup> Ioh VIII.394–402: *protinus Ifnaten sequitur, quem cuspidē longa | auersum post terga ferit, qua spina sedentis | colligat incuruas nodorum robore costas. | ossibus haerentem recipit dum feruidus hastam | luctaturque diu uellens, uenit ecce superbus | Mirmidonis tremulumque intentat mittere telum. | ille tamen rapiens morientis missile torsit, | conixus uirtute sua, mediumque per hostem | transadigit tetigitque nouo praecordia ligno.* Riedlberger (2010), 357 reads *uellens* on l.398.

<sup>192</sup> Ioh V.297–315; VIII.586–606. <sup>193</sup> Ioh V.316–25. <sup>194</sup> Ioh V.339–45; VIII.607–9.

<sup>195</sup> Ioh V.291–6 at 294: *morte dedit uaria.* Ioh VI.638–75.

<sup>196</sup> Prominence of other *armigeri*: Ioh V.279–80; VIII.423–7; VIII.620 <sup>197</sup> Ioh VIII.479–509.

<sup>198</sup> Ioh V.201–39. <sup>199</sup> Nill (2019).

continued on in its course, piercing through the temples of savage Cambrus. As the unlucky Cambrus pitched forward, taken by another's wound, Barsippa attacked the soldier (*armiger*), protected by his shield and brandishing his balanced spear. But when he jumped up, taunting his great enemy with his shield, Barsippa was caught in the stomach by a swift feathered arrow and he fell to earth with a great crash.<sup>200</sup>

The choreography of this sequence demonstrates the poetic ingenuity of the author, but also succinctly represents the chaos of battle: moments of martial skill combine with hubris and misfortune in rapid succession. Crucially, the victims of these episodes are not only hostile Moors, and soldiers on both sides fall one after another.

Corippus' descriptions of battle are unusually partisan. Hostile Moors feature almost exclusively as the victims of violence rather than as heroic perpetrators. This was unusual in the epic tradition, where antagonists were typically granted *aristeiae* of their own, not least as a reflection of their heroic stature. Although the long lists of Moorish names in the *Iohannis* are presumably authentic, and the poem thus memorializes the dead among the rebel army, the figures in these passages are rarely more than glamorous cannon (or sword) fodder for the imperial heroes.<sup>201</sup> Only Bruten among the rebel commanders is granted a direct speech at the height of battle, and while Antalas and Carcasan are both presented as combatants, they are dramatically overshadowed by their opponents.<sup>202</sup> Antalas kills five allied soldiers, culminating in the ironically named Maurus, but this is the only episode approaching a Moorish *aristeia* in the poem.<sup>203</sup> Conspicuously, the only other sequence of victories over named Romans is truncated abruptly. Midway through the account of Antonia Castra, Corippus describes Bruten's bloody killing of Paul and the further victories of Ialdus over Largus, Sinzera over Crescens and Ilasan over Servandus. The sequence is halted, however, by Hidreasan's failed challenge of the Roman tribune Marcianus, who then embarks on a short *aristeia* of his own, which claims

<sup>200</sup> *Ioh* V.328–35: *pinnatum Antifan Dorotis arundine fixit. | protinus inflexum curuat fortissimus arcum | excussa que ferit fortem Maggite sagitta. | uoluitur ille cadens: cursus seruauit arundo | pulsa suos, saeui fugiens per tempora Cambri. | Cambrus ut infelix, alieno uulnere raptus, | corruit in frontem, armigerum Barsippa petiuit | protectus clipeo et librata concitus hasta. | subsiliens dum ludit magnum umbone per hostem, | pinnigerum Barsippa leuis per uiscera ferrum | suscipit et magno ad terram cum pondere fluxit.*

<sup>201</sup> There is some hint at the desire to memorialize in *Ioh* VIII.530–3 and to distinguish prominent Moors from those *sine nomine*. But it is conspicuous that this statement is made to accompany an *aristeia* of John's (and hence accentuate his achievement). This is a conspicuous contrast with the 'barbarian' names from the anonymous *Blemyomachia* which were evidently appropriated from the *Iliad* and were clearly not Blemmyan in origin. Steinrück (1999), fr. 11; Livrea (1978), 60–1.

<sup>202</sup> *Ioh* V.159–82; Antalas fighting: V.224–47.

<sup>203</sup> *Ioh* V.240–59; Schindler (2007), 185–6; Schindler (2009), 268–72.



four victims.<sup>204</sup> Partisanship of some kind was common enough within earlier epics, of course, but was rarely so stark: the absence of prominent Moors as protagonists within these battles remains conspicuous. This is not a clash of armies fought by heroes of almost comparable status, but the application of epic tropes to one side only.<sup>205</sup>

### *Battles and the Big Picture*

The long and formulaic battle descriptions sit somewhat uneasily within a primary narrative that responded much more immediately to recent events. In them, the audience is taken from a plausibly uneven account studded with historical details to the staged rehearsal of epic tropes and *topoi* in which only the parade of unusual Moorish names clearly distinguishes the *Iohannis* from earlier epics.<sup>206</sup> Striking as this shift is, the battle narratives themselves were not all alike: the poet also tailored the details of these episodes to the wider narrative goals of his project and to the political context within which he worked. The point is illustrated most succinctly by the treatment of the Battle near Marta in Book VI, in which John was defeated.<sup>207</sup> This episode is unlike its companions: Corippus skirts over the initial moments of the battle, truncates the rhythmic exchanges of attack and counter-attack which define the other battles, and includes no heroic *aristeiae*. Instead, around a third of the account concerns the heroic death of John Senior, and the lamentations of his widow in the aftermath occupy a further forty-four lines.<sup>208</sup> These were common epic tropes in their own right, of course, but they were not deployed elsewhere in the *Iohannis*. The events at Marta contribute to the grand narrative of John's campaign but are a dark moment within it, and the poet's account of them is tailored accordingly.

The descriptions of the battles in Books V and VIII are much more alike, and some of the similarities have been noted. Our analysis is hampered here by the loss of what may have been a substantial section at the start of the final battle, and of its closing lines, but the structural parallels are evident. Both take place over the course of a single day, and open with the speeches and (presumably) troop dispositions of the two commanders. Both battles end with the deaths of prominent Moorish leaders, although that of Ierna at the end of Book V is much more richly described than the brief account of

<sup>204</sup> *Iob* V.195–223.   <sup>205</sup> Schindler (2007), 184–7; Schindler (2009), 265–6.

<sup>206</sup> Schindler (2007), 182, and compare Kern (2007), 102.   <sup>207</sup> Schindler (2007), 186–9.

<sup>208</sup> *Iob* VI.704–73; VII.154–98; Dorfbauer (2007), 201–5; Schindler (2007), 189, and compare Riedlberger (2010), 152–4.



John's killing of Carcasan in Book VIII.<sup>209</sup> There are also internal similarities: John has two *aristeiae* in each battle and Ricinarius has one; John's speeches help turn the battle in each case, and Moorish leaders are also given short speeches in their own cause. Many *topoi* also appear in both passages. But the contrasts between them are also striking. Here again, Corippus frequently worked within the established repertoire of epic, but his selective deployment of these tropes helped the development of his wider story.

Corippus is at pains to connect the victory at Campi Catonis to John's campaign, and hence to the political message of the *Iohannis*. Most of the metaleptic references in the battle sequences – that is, the moments when the poet reflects on the connection between the fighting and the poetic memorialization of these actions – are concentrated in the final book of the *Iohannis*.<sup>210</sup> It is here where the poet most clearly takes stock of the purpose of his work and reflects on the connection between the narrated events of battle and the authorial present. This is most apparent, of course, in the explicit references to the triumphal celebrations which will mark the victory and the successful resolution of the imperial expedition. We have already explored the proleptic function of Putzintulus' dying speech, in which he anticipates the triumph which will go ahead without him, and the surrender of the Moors Camalus and Zabbas, which ensures their own position among John's captives.<sup>211</sup> Both of these episodes are familiar epic tropes. The final words of a dying soldier are a common literary motif, and Corippus' account of Zabbas' surrender was directly modelled on a Virgilian intertext, as we have seen.<sup>212</sup> Despite these antecedents, however, there are no comparable passages elsewhere in the *Iohannis*.

The equivalent moment in the description of Antonia Castra comes in John's penetration of the Moors' camp and the slaughter that follows. This is one of the most peculiar passages in the *Iohannis*. It bears some similarity to Virgil's famous *Iliupersis* – his description of the fall of Troy – and may have been based upon it, but the subject matter is much less elevated.<sup>213</sup> John leads the attack on the camp in person. There, he demonstrates his prowess through the slaughter of livestock and the capture of camp followers, and his soldiers take their lead from him:

He was the first in attacking the camp, and struck a great camel in its legs  
with his sword, for the strength of the beast is concealed in the tendons

<sup>209</sup> *Iob* V.493–521 (Ierna); VIII.627–34 (Carcasan).

<sup>210</sup> Compare for example, *Iob* VIII.498–509; VIII.531–3.

<sup>211</sup> *Iob* VIII.479–97; VIII.569–83. See Chapter 3. <sup>212</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>213</sup> *Iob* V.421–38. See Schindler (2009), 249, on the *Iliupersis* parallels.

there. Then the painful wound went through both legs and severed both bones like small trees. The twisting camel fell backwards to the ground with a hideous screech, and crushed two Moors beneath its weight, who had hidden under its raised belly in fear of the general. It squeezed their mangled bones, mixed up with their marrow. Then a Gaetolian woman tumbled backwards from the camel's back with her two children, and their baggage crashed down on top of them as they fell.<sup>214</sup>

This strikes a discordant note after the hard fighting earlier in the day. While we might plausibly regard John's toppling of the camels as emblematic of his victory over a foreign foe, the non-combatants who are trapped in its fall remain a troubling detail.<sup>215</sup> This is accentuated in the lines that follow, where accounts of combat seamlessly shift into the description of other Roman soldiers put the camp to the sword.<sup>216</sup> The victorious troops drag captive women away from their children by their hair, kill others alongside their husbands and trample camp followers into the dirt, until 'all perished and the *tarua* of the Moors was nowhere to be found'.<sup>217</sup>

This episode resolves John's earlier boasts to destroy (if not eat) the Moorish camp; it also closely recalls the fearful dreams of the barbarians before battle that their camp will be sacked.<sup>218</sup> But perhaps more important is the anticipation of the truncated victory ceremony at the start of the next book. The trophies taken by John – women and children, camels and other animals – are precisely those described in Book VI. There, the dazzling sight of Roman arms and armour contrasts with the rather understated spoils taken in battle:

Each delighted to observe the captive Moorish women go past, riding on tall camels with their foreheads lined, gathering their small children beneath their breasts in fear. Others with saddened faces – alas, poor mothers! – struggle to balance their bundles and cradles, encircling them with both arms.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>214</sup> *Ioh* V.421–32: *et ipse | castra petens primus magnum ferit ense camelum, | qua pedibus uis cuncta feri latet insita neruis. | tunc per utrumque femur uulnus transiuit acerbum | et geminas secuit conciso robore coxas. | retro ruit reuolutus humi stridore camelus | horribili geminosque impressit pondere Maurois | ossaque contriuit quassis male mista medullis, | qui ducis horrifico celsam terrore sub aluum | condiderant sese. cecidit resupina duobus | cum genitis Gaetula iacens, supraque cadentes | sarcina lapsa ruit.*

<sup>215</sup> There is a parallel of sorts in Agathias III.27 on the wounding of an elephant at the siege of Onoguris, on which see Whately (2016), 162.

<sup>216</sup> The crux is at *Ioh* V.467, where the troops shift from combat to plunder: *feriunt discrimine nullo* ('they took without discrimination').

<sup>217</sup> *Ioh* V.467–92 at 492: *omnia iam pereunt: Maurorum tarua nusquam.*

<sup>218</sup> *Ioh* II. 474–7 – they see their camels taken and their camp penetrated. Note also III.314–19, where the younger John is described in the action of sacking the rebel camp (and where his victims are all soldiers).

<sup>219</sup> *Ioh* VI.82–7: *captiuas cernere Mauras | ire iuuat, celsis inscripta fronte camelis | ut pauidae sedeant paruosque sub ubere natos | contineant. aliae geminis ambire lacertis | sarcinulas super et parui cunabula lecti | (heu miserae matres!) uultu maerente laborant.*

It is difficult to assess precisely what a display like this would have meant to a sixth-century audience, whether this was the crowd who assembled to witness this at first hand in 546, or those who heard Corippus' verses some years later having experienced the more spectacular celebrations after 548. It is possible that the exotic alterity of these captives was an attraction and that the poet intended his account of the triumph to be read as essentially celebratory.<sup>220</sup> Yet the long history of Roman triumphs suggests that the parade of modest military trophies was not always warmly received. Crowds who felt pity for captives could sometimes turn hostile.<sup>221</sup> Corippus does not suggest anything so dramatic here, but his sympathetic presentation of the captive women is noteworthy, and the contrast with the later celebrations must have been apparent to contemporaries.<sup>222</sup> The poet implies that the capture of these prisoners provoked Carcasan in his new offensive, and the resumption of hostilities in 547 revealed John's victory to be incomplete.<sup>223</sup> In many ways, this had already been established in the account of the earlier battle, where the focal moment of John's victory seems anticlimactic and the trophies taken unworthy of a grand campaign.

A further shift is apparent in the nature of Corippus' references to the chaos and confusion of the battlefield, and once more there is a marked difference between the account of Campi Catonis and the accounts of earlier conflicts. The battle in Book V includes descriptions of mass, undifferentiated combat in which allies and enemies cannot be distinguished:

The brave Romans and the Moors – both rebels and allies – rushed together at once. Brother could not recognize brother, covered as they were with thick dust. A friend could not know his dearest friend then, and citizen could not recognize fellow citizen. The battlefront mingled units with no order in grim fighting, and regiments attacked with bristling weapons.<sup>224</sup>

Corippus goes on to describe men unable to wield their weapons because of the crush of bodies and wounds caused by invisible weapons. All of this is entirely formulaic, typical of epic combat sequences. Yet, in the context of

<sup>220</sup> Compare Cameron (1984), 172–3, and Dodi (1986a), 117 (on the triumph as an assertion of Roman order) and Tommasi (2013), 281 (who interprets the celebrations in Book VI as wholly positive).

<sup>221</sup> Cassius Dio 43.19 on the presentation of Arsinoe in Caesar's triumph of 46 BCE and the pity of the crowd is the best known example. On this (and others), see Beard (2007), 136–7; Jenkyns (2013), 4–5, is more sceptical about the ambivalences of these displays.

<sup>222</sup> Castronuovo (1997), 413–14; Sannicandro (2012), 474–5. <sup>223</sup> *Ioh* VI.109–11.

<sup>224</sup> *Ioh* V.354–9: *Romanique simul fortes Maurique rebelles | pacificique ruunt. frater nec cognitus ulli | pulvere concretus, carum nec notus amicum | cernere tunc potuit ciuemue agnoscere cuius. | miscuerant acies nullo dicrimine turmas | Marte graui, densisque incurrunt agmina telis.*

the African wars, the chiasmus of lines 354–5 – Romans, Moors, rebels and peacemakers – which confuses friendly and allied Moors, is noteworthy, as are the references to brothers, allies and citizens, which again betray an echo of internecine warfare.

These problems are resolved in the final battle of the epic. The campaign of 548 was darkened by the looming shadow of mutiny and civil conflict, as we have seen. In Books VII and VIII, Corippus describes both a dispute between the Moorish allies which had to be calmed by a Roman officer, and a mutiny within the Roman army which was quelled by Cusina in turn.<sup>225</sup> Once on the battlefield, however, these issues have disappeared. Fighting clarifies the affiliations and identities of the participants rather than confusing them, as it does earlier in the epic. The dramatic turning point of the battle illustrates this well. When news reaches John of the difficulties faced by Cusina, he first despatches other troops, under a handful of officers in support.<sup>226</sup> Then, when this fails, he sets off himself, explaining his actions in appropriately Virgilian terms:

The Roman empire recognizes *gentes* who are faithful and subject to it, and regards them as Latin citizens. It has subdued the whole world, pleasing because of this piety, and raises up the humble with its strength, and humbles the rebellious. Cusina conducts war with the greatest fidelity to our arms, in uncertain battle. If he is not harmed by the enemy, then the fame of our name will resound through the ages. Let Roman faith, strength and effort be seen now! Go, oh soldiers, and at this key moment in this war, relieve this man with your aid and strike down the proud tribes. Allies! Save our clients!<sup>227</sup>

Again, all of the component parts of this episode – news reaching the commander of difficulties, the relief charge, the *adlocutio* to the troops – are utterly formulaic, but presented in this way, they are fundamental to the resolution of the *Iohannis*. John's speech, of course, is a final reiteration of the Virgilian principle *parcere subiectis et debellare superbus*, and an enaction of the political obligation at its core: battles and wars would be won by supporting allies, as well as by defeating foes.<sup>228</sup> Conspicuously, the commanders who are first sent to support Cusina in battle are Putzintulus,

<sup>225</sup> *Ioh* VII.242–61, VIII.121–9. <sup>226</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 379–84, discusses this passage.

<sup>227</sup> *Ioh* VIII.461–71: *Romanum imperium, gentes quascumque fideles | subiectasque uidet, ciues putat esse Latinos. | hac pietate placens totum sibi subdidit orbem, | dum releuat uirtute humiles humilisque rebelles. | Cusina bella gerit, nostris fidissimus armis, | Marte sub ancipiti: quem si non laeserit hostis, | nomen erit nostrae mansurum in saecula famae. | cernatur Romana fides uirtusque laborque. | eia agite, o iuuenes, tanto in discrimine Martis | auxilio releuate uirum gentesque superbas | deicite et uestros, socii, saluate clientes.*

<sup>228</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 380–4.

Geiserith, Sinduit and Fronimuth: respectively an officer who seems to have originated in the Balkans, and three individuals with Germanic names.<sup>229</sup> Allied *gentes* are sent in support of the further ally who needs help, thereby placing Cusina within this diverse *imperium*. Just as Cusina as a 'good Moor' has done his bit for the forces of occupation, so John is required to reciprocate, and he does so using the allied forces at his disposal. We cannot know, of course, whether this episode was based on events which actually took place in the battle or was an invention of Corippus' own. At the very least, it was certainly distorted by the generic constraints of the form in which he worked. No less important, it was also shaped by the wider narrative – and political – ambitions of the epic.

### Conclusions

The *Iohannis* is an important source on military activity in the early years of the Byzantine occupation of North Africa, particularly when read alongside our other sources. The narrative that Corippus provides of the fighting of 546–8 is probably reliable in outline and allows us to follow the key stages in John's campaign, even if it is much less full than modern historians might like. The epic also provides specific details on troop numbers, military organization and strategy which broadly correspond to our other sources on the sixth-century army and can contribute to the wider understanding of the Justinianic military, but can be read only with considerable care. Corippus wrote about – and in some cases for – the officer corps of John's army, and his poem probably faithfully represented their view of events, albeit shaped by the literary filters of his epic form.

Crucially, these literary conventions should not be read as a series of inconveniences to be explained away: if we attempt to interpret the *Iohannis* simply as a military campaign report which happens to have been written in verse, we would miss a great deal of its historical value. Epic not only allowed Corippus to present John's victories on a mythic scale, and hence accentuate the magnitude of his accomplishment, it also provided a medium in which he could explore the bloody violence of his battles. As a number of scholars have noted, passages of visceral violence became increasingly commonplace in late antique writing on battle, but none of the prose writers in this period can compare with the wave of mutilation stirred up in the *Iohannis*. In this, the poet partly developed existing epic convention, which had always delighted in such themes, but

<sup>229</sup> See above 188.

the sixth-century writer accentuated these aspects of the form more than any of his predecessors, (with the possible exception of Lucan). Despite this tradition, however, contemporary epicists did not share Corippus' taste for the macabre, and the *Iohannis* is a remarkable monument to this form. If the author drew upon some contemporary sensibilities and some literary convention in constructing his monument to bloodshed, then, the combination remained his own.

This chapter has suggested that the startling violence of Corippus' epic was intended in large part as a resolution to the ambivalences and ambiguities discussed in earlier chapters. In the long analepsis of Books III–IV, the poet revealed some of the complexities of the problems that faced Byzantine North Africa in 546, not least the weaknesses that had undermined from within. There, and elsewhere in the epic, Corippus also revealed the uncertainties of 'Moorish' identity in this period, not least in the difficulties of distinguishing friend from foe – the proud to be suppressed, and the subject to be defended. Battle provided the stage on which these uncertain identities would finally be resolved. In recounting these battles in such detail – in descriptions of sliced eyes and penetrated lungs, of decapitated corpses and bloodied heroes – Corippus also provided his audience with a final moment of cathartic release.

*Christianity and Paganism in the Iohannis*

It was a dark and stormy crossing. John Troglita's fleet encountered the spectres of Troy as the ships passed the promontory of Ilium, the memory of Scylla and Charybdis as they came through the Straits of Messina and a tempest worthy of any epic in the open seas. But the most unsettling moment came after the departure from Sicily. Midway through the first book of the epic, John is visited at night by two angelic figures as his crew sleep. The first is a fallen angel (*malignus angelus*), in the form of a Moor:

[A] sad figure came before the feet of the commander. The face appeared Moorish, related to the darkness, horrid in its black colour, and his eyes swirling with flames. Then it spoke like this: 'To which shores do you guide your fleet? Do you think to cross to Libya?' In replying to these words the leader said: 'You see our ships crossing and you ask me that?' Then the sad figure, glowering and twisting its eyes hideous in their sulphurous monstrosity, said: 'You will not pass.' He understood then that this was an evil-minded angel cast out from high Olympus.<sup>1</sup>

His second visitor is a figure 'wearing a white cloak of stars'.<sup>2</sup> This angel assures John of the righteousness of his mission and calms him after the earlier visitation.<sup>3</sup> The audience is left uncertain whether the episode was intended to be read as a dream of the general's or a sequence of events which had actually occurred during the crossing. The threats of the demon come to nothing and John's angelic visitor does not return.

This episode encapsulates the religious themes of the *Iohannis* quite well. It illustrates vividly an essential opposition which runs throughout the poem between belligerent, tenebrous paganism and the benevolent light of

<sup>1</sup> *Iob* 1.243–53: *cum tristis imago | ductoris stetit ante pedes: cognata tenebris | Mauva uidebatur facies nigroque colore | horrida et obductis contorquens lumina flammis. | tunc sic orsa loqui: 'quas classes tendis in oras? | in Libyam transire putas?' cui uerba remittens | ductor ait: 'cernis nostras transire carinas, | meque rogas?' uultu minitans tunc tristis imago, | horrida sulfureis contorquens lumina monstros, | 'non transibis' ait. sensit quod mente malignus | angelus ille fuit celso deiectus Olympo.*

<sup>2</sup> *Iob* 1.260: *candida sidereis gestans uelamina peplis.* <sup>3</sup> *Iob* 1.258–70.

the Christian church. On the one hand, we see an unthinking, instinctive hostility to John's mission, manifested in a caricatured personification of Africa; on the other, a simple confidence in the righteousness of John's mission and the inevitability of its eventual success. The somewhat abstracted nature of the figures within the episode is also noteworthy, and typical of the poem. Neither the 'Moorish' demon nor the Christian angel is identifiable in John's vision, and it seems likely that this ambiguity was deliberate.<sup>4</sup> The *Iohannis* is not an epic which describes the struggle between Christian saints and Moorish demons, but rather a narrative in which the central human protagonists – and the various soldiers, bishops and demons around them – are utterly subordinated to the will of God.

If Corippus was concerned to locate his epic within the ongoing struggle between the church and its infernal opponents, the *Iohannis* was nevertheless centrally implicated in the intricate religious politics of North Africa in the late 540s and early 550s. This may seem a peculiar assertion, not least because of the poet's silence on many topics that agitated his contemporaries: the *Iohannis* includes nothing on the sectarian tensions of the Vandal period, is silent on contemporary Christian life in the occupied provinces and alludes only obliquely to the theological tensions of the Three Chapters controversy, which were reaching boiling point in the later 540s and 550s.<sup>5</sup> Consequently this is one of the very few texts written in North Africa during the early Byzantine occupation which is not directly concerned with issues of church organization or the interpretation of scripture. Corippus' account of Libyan paganism also seems timeless, albeit in different ways. Scholars have connected Corippus' tantalizing fragments on named Moorish gods and the peculiar circumstances of their worship to other textual and archaeological evidence from across North Africa, thereby creating a more or less composite image of non-Christian religious practice. Others have identified the many literary commonplaces within these passages – particularly in the oracle episodes – and have concluded that the poem can have little historical value for the reality of the religious experience in the sixth century.

The present chapter seeks to place Corippus' treatment of religious themes firmly in its historical context, and to show how his celebration of the victory of Christian order over pagan chaos had an immediate political resonance in around 550. Corippus enabled this by permeating

<sup>4</sup> Shea (1998), 71, identifies the Christian figure as 'John's own father'; Vinchesi (1983), 212, suggests that this may be Cyrian of Carthage. Compare Zarini (2010), 100–1. The 'demonic' appearance of a black-skinned individual is also asserted in a near-contemporary epigram from the *Latin Anthology*: AL R 183 / S 173. On which see Kay (2006), 328–32, and Starks (2011), 246–7.

<sup>5</sup> The details are discussed later in this chapter.



his poem with Christian assumptions, and the first part of the chapter explores this appropriation of epic tropes to new religious ends. Equally important, however, was his demonstration that Roman military victory represented the success of the whole Christian community, irrespective of ongoing doctrinal disputes, and that the Moorish gods had been utterly defeated, even if they retained followers among the allies of Rome. The central part of the chapter explores Corippus' anonymized portraits of two North African churchmen within his poem, both of whom were prominent spokesmen of the dissident position in the Three Chapters controversy, and yet are presented in the *Iohannis* as unambiguous champions of John's military activity. The final part of the chapter considers Corippus' treatment of the Moorish gods within the poem. It argues that these accounts include valuable information for historians of religion, but that they must be read with caution. It is suggested that Corippus' account of these figures connected directly to a wider programme of imperial evangelism which followed John's victory, and in which the epic itself was centrally implicated. The *Iohannis* provides important information about Moorish religion as it existed, but this is most relevant for the world of the sixth century, specifically in the context of its anticipated suppression.

### Christianity within the Poem

It is important to stress at the outset that the *Iohannis* is set within a wholly Christian cosmos, and it reflects the religious assumptions of the poet and his intended audience. While the secular subject matter of Corippus' poem contrasts with the work of Christian epicists like Juvenius or Sedulius, who translated scripture into Latin hexameters, or the martyrological, allegorical or confessional subject matter of Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius and Dracontius, the *Iohannis* is clearly a Christian text.<sup>6</sup> Corippus knew the work of these earlier writers well, and probably composed explicitly religious poetry of his own, although this has not survived.<sup>7</sup> For all of these writers the secular Latin tradition of Virgil and his successors represented a mixed inheritance: the poetry of the late Republic and early empire provided exquisite inspiration upon which to draw, but also expressed troubling religious and moral sentiments.<sup>8</sup> As a writer of 'secular' epic,

<sup>6</sup> On the Christian epic tradition, see Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 1. On Corippus' Christian poetry, see especially Hofmann (1989) and Hofmann (2015), 99–102.

<sup>8</sup> The bibliography is vast. See especially the important studies of MacCormack (1998); Peltari (2014); Hardie (2019) and the discussions therein.

Corippus was particularly affected by this anxiety, not least because the narrative conventions and established imagery of the form often rested heavily on a bedrock of mythological material. Despite this, he was at pains to distance himself from the religious underpinnings of the tradition and establish his own Christian voice.

This is perhaps clearest in the issue of agency within the *Iohannis*. Where the Homeric and Virgilian narratives were partially played out on the celestial realm, and presented human suffering as the outcome of deeper conflicts between the gods, Corippus' poem is set almost entirely on earth. The Christian God is the prime mover behind these unfolding events, but all other characters – including the Moorish oracles and apparitions – are explicitly presented as subordinate to His divine plan.<sup>9</sup> This is expressed most clearly in the direct speech of John. In the aftermath of the defeat at Marta, for example, he makes precisely this point in an echo of Psalm 126:

The carefulness of man is certainly vain, if God does not care. Nor can anyone conquer in war in his own strength. It is only the Almighty who crushes enemies, who moves, overturns, casts down all things. Yet the Romans are not too hateful to the Lord on high for it was His will to save my men who were harassed by many thousands of foes.<sup>10</sup>

These Christian foundations are obscured somewhat by what we might term an 'epic syncretism', which preserves a fossilized mythological language within the poem. Ancient myths are evoked directly, most obviously in the account of John's departure from Carthage in Book I:

In this manner Jupiter, as the ancient bards say in gentile singing, when savage Phlegra stood against the turmoil of the Giants, instructed the heavenly troops what fate desired: with what bolt of lightning he could strike down those born of the earth, with what spear Mars would lay low their pierced bodies, whom Pallas would turn to stone with the Gorgon when she was seen, whom the bow-bearer would kill with a thick flight of arrows or swift Delia pierce with her dart cast.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gärtner (2008), 49–50.

<sup>10</sup> *Ioh* VII.38–44: *uana est hominum uigilantia certe | non uigilante deo. propriis non uiribus ullus | uincere bella potest. solus qui conerit hostes | omnipotens, qui cuncta mouet uertitque ruitque. | non tamen excelsio nimium Romana propago | inuisa est domino, tanta inter milia pressos | quod uoluit saluare meos.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ioh* I.451–9: *sic Iuppiter ille, | ut ueteres aiunt gentili carmine uates, | saeua Giganteo dum staret Phlegra tumultu, | caelicolum turmas quid uellent fata monebat: | sternere terrigenas posset quo fulminis ictu, | cuspide qua Mauors transfixos funderet artus | uerteret in montes uisa quos Gorgone Pallas, | Arcitenens crebris quis ferret fata sagittis, | quosque leuis torto fixisset Delia telo.* Compare the similar passage in *Ioh* V. 154–8.

Passages like this placed John's campaigns firmly within the mythological epic tradition, and the use of well-worn classical metaphors had much the same effect. Mars, for example, appears more than sixty times as a metaphor for war.<sup>12</sup> Phoebus (Apollo) is used twelve times over the course of the *Iohannis* as a synonym for the sun (or sunrise), and Cynthia twice stands in for the moon.<sup>13</sup> Bacchus and Ceres are evoked in the celebration of terrestrial plenty, or serve without comment as synonyms for 'wine' and 'bread', and Bellona and the Furies lend the warring barbarians a classical frisson.<sup>14</sup> Corippus' use of this language need not be read as religiously inspired and is better regarded as the conventional idiom of historical epic.<sup>15</sup> His description of the celestial paradise as 'Olympus' underscores the point, as does his attribution of the epithet of Jupiter *Tonans* ('Thunderer') to the Christian God.<sup>16</sup> In this, Corippus followed a very well-established tradition in Christian poetry not least in the work of Juvenecus and Sedulius, and his compatriot Dracontius.<sup>17</sup>

Corippus' treatment of *pietas* within the *Iohannis* also illuminates the metaphysical underpinnings of the epic and its departure from the classical epic tradition. *Pietas* was, of course, a central concept within Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose hero is distinguished by the epithet *pious* and where this quality determines his progress through the epic. For Christian readers of Virgil's work, however, the warlike and wrathful behaviour of Aeneas was a reminder of the dangers of placing the Roman poet on too high a pedestal.<sup>18</sup> On the most straightforward level, Corippus' John simply surpasses Virgil's Aeneas through his more rigorously Christian piety: his merciful treatment of the Moorish prisoners in Book VIII is implicitly contrasted with the actions of Virgil's hero and illustrates this well.<sup>19</sup> It is also noteworthy that John's piety

<sup>12</sup> Partsch (1879), 159–63, provides a full index of mythological references. Compare Shea (1973), 123–5.

<sup>13</sup> Phoebus: *Ioh* II.158; III.26, 85, 225; IV.25, 257, 529; VI.459; VII.320; VIII.227, 279, 318. Cynthia: II.418; VIII.279.

<sup>14</sup> Bacchus: *Ioh* III.33 (Iachus), III.71, VI.306, VII.70; Ceres: III.324, VI.296; VII.70; Bellona: III.36; VI.566; VII.519 (actually represented as a god); Tisiphone, Erinys and Alecto: III.37; IV.327; VIII.136.

<sup>15</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2007) argues that the deployment of classical mythological motifs may have been to undercut the religious power of these familiar tropes. This relates to similar scholarly approach to Dracontius' 'secular' poetry, including Gualandri (1999) and (since) Gosserez (2015).

<sup>16</sup> Olympus: *Ioh* I.253 and 259 are certainly allusions to the Christian heaven. *Tonans*: *Ioh* IV.115; compare V.156 and 395–9.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Juvenecus, II.795; IV.553, 672 and 786; Sedulius, *Carm. Pasch.* II.205–7; V.17–19; V.72–3 (referring to Christ); Prudentius *Apoth* 171–2; *Cath* VI.81 and XII.83 and Dracontius, *DLD* I.1, 19, 674; compare Zarini (2006), 53, and Goldlust (2017), 138.

<sup>18</sup> Lactantius, *Instit.* V.10; Bureau (2015), 232–6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ioh* VIII.569–83. As noted in Chapter 3, the direct Virgilian intertext here is Aeneas' treatment of Magus in *Aen* X.524–36, but the structural parallel with the killing of Turnus in the final lines of the same poem is also striking.

is manifested directly in four extended prayers within the *Iohannis*: he is the principal interlocutor between the human and divine worlds within the poem.<sup>20</sup> Aeneas had also appealed to the gods, of course, but John's prayers are marked with a humility which has no parallel in the earlier poem, and this is central to these sequences, as we shall see.

John is not the only conduit of *pietas* within the *Iohannis* and conspicuously Corippus never bestows Aeneas' epithet upon him.<sup>21</sup> Instead, as several important discussions have recently noted, the *pietas* within the epic is much more widely diffused and distinguishes the nature of the many relationships which hold the Christian world (and universe) together.<sup>22</sup> In the short encomium at the outset of the poem, for example, *pietas* is represented as one manifestation of divine benevolence and proof of the permanent balance John's victories have brought to Africa:

Now Pietas turns its gaze from the lofty heavens to earth. With Justitia at her side, joyful Concordia at once extends both arms in her embrace and restores the world.<sup>23</sup>

Other references are more precise. In each of his prayers, John appeals to God's *pietas* in seeking support for his campaigns, but his supplications are themselves made 'with pious heart': in this way, *pietas* defines every aspect of this relationship.<sup>24</sup> The same language is used to describe Justinian's responsibilities towards the inhabitants of his empire, and John's towards his troops.<sup>25</sup> It also defines the young Peter's relationship to his father, as well as the social bonds which had been fragmented in Africa in the grim aftermath of the plague.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps most important, Roman obligations towards the subject peoples of the empire are shaped by *pietas*. Here again, we turn to the climactic resolution of this theme when John comes to Cusina's aid at the climactic battle of Campi Catonis in Book VIII:

Roman power (*imperium*) recognizes *gentes* who are faithful and subject to it, and regards them as Latin citizens. It has subdued the whole world

<sup>20</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2004–5), 217–20; Bureau (2015), 228–32. <sup>21</sup> Consolino (2015), 190.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Consolino (2015), and see also Bureau (2015), 233–6, and Mattei (2015).

<sup>23</sup> *Ioh* I.11–13: *iam Pietas caelo terras prospexit ab alto, | Iustitia comitante simul Concordia mundum | laeta fouens reficit geminis amplexa lacertis.*

<sup>24</sup> Appeals to God's *pietas*: *Ioh* I.301; IV.284; VII.99 and VIII.349; John's attitude as supplicant: I.282 (*erigit . . . pietate*); IV.267 (*corde pio*); VII.105 (*concussus pietate pater*); VIII.338 (*exorans . . . pietate*).

<sup>25</sup> Compare for example *Ioh* I.131, 140, 158, 342, 502; II.294–8, 330, 340, 353, 361, 392; IV.340, 592; VII.225.

<sup>26</sup> Peter: *Ioh* I.200; VII.213. Plague: III.378.

because of this piety, and raises up the humble with its strength, and humbles the rebellious.<sup>27</sup>

Corippus' many references to the impiety of the hostile Moors stand in sharp contrast to this.<sup>28</sup> This is not merely an allusion to their paganism – although this is important, as we shall see – but more generally to their position outside the Christian order of the universe. The Moorish rising and the Roman mutinies are also repeatedly described as *impius* for the same reason.<sup>29</sup>

The concepts of *fatum*, *fortuna* and *sors* (variously 'fate', 'destiny', 'fortune' and 'lot' or 'chance') occupy similar positions within the *Iohannis*. As we saw in Chapter 3, the teleological framing of the narrative is pronounced and has close affinities to earlier epics, not least through Corippus' use of analepses and prolepses to situate the action of his poem in the wider unfolding of history. When this relates to the destinies of individual characters, and particularly their coming deaths on the battlefield, this is often alluded to in terms of their *fatum* or *sors*, and the same language is used for Romans and Moors alike.<sup>30</sup> Both concepts are also used to refer to the wider vicissitudes of the characters and groups in the epic as they suffer storms, battles, grief and occasional moments of good fortune.<sup>31</sup> *Fortuna* is used in a similar sense, and appears particularly frequently in direct speech: John Troglita makes extensive reference to the concept when encouraging his troops.<sup>32</sup> Although some commentators have suggested that *fatum* generally relates to evil outcomes for the individuals concerned, this is not consistent and simply reflects the grim end for the majority of named characters within Corippus' poem.<sup>33</sup>

*Fatum* is also used extensively in the context of the Moorish prophecies and in the rebels' hubristic declarations of their own anticipated success.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ioh* VIII.461–4: *Romanum imperium, gentes quascumque fideles | subiectasque uidet, ciues putat esse Latinos. | hac pietate placens totum sibi subdidit orbem, | dum releuat uirtute humiles humilataque rebelles.*

And compare II.373 and VI.435 which define other treaties with Moorish federates in the same terms.

<sup>28</sup> *Ioh* II.104, 183; IV.23, 140; VI.44, 88, 90, 458; VIII.23, 236.

<sup>29</sup> *Ioh* III.45; IV.274; VIII.89; VIII.152. And compare also VIII.63, 120.

<sup>30</sup> *Fatum*: *Ioh* III.403, IV.249, 484; V.253, 320, 525, 640; VI.310, 317, 505, 537, 710; VII.360, VIII.105, 619. *Sors*: *Ioh* I.391; IV.37, 157, 188; V.144; VI.520, 622; VII.366; VIII.238. *Fortuna* used in a similar sense only for Pappus (*Ioh* I.397) and John Senior (VI.771).

<sup>31</sup> Compare: *Ioh* I.279; III.192; IV.37, 65; VI.91, 447, 565; VIII.58, 105, 253.

<sup>32</sup> Compare for example *Ioh*. I.279; III.203, 235, .271, 413, 424, 430; IV.130, 203, V.60; VI.347, 365, 445, 661, 720; VII.80. Direct speech: I.561, II.324, 374; III.22; IV.373, 420, 436, 450; VI.117.

<sup>33</sup> See Shea (1973), 125; Blansdorf (1975), 532, n. 16 and the comments in Riedlberger (2010), 151–2. There are parallels here to the treatment of *Tyche* in Procopius *Wars*, on which see especially Brodka (2004), 57–9. I am grateful to Robin Whelan for this observation.

<sup>34</sup> See *Ioh* III.83, 88, 106–8, 124, 155; VI.162–5. See also the appeals at V.182, VI.559, VII.537 and VIII.315. Compare also the account of the Moors' dreams before the battle (and their anticipated fate) at IV.472–7.

As we have seen, these prophecies are not entirely hollow; they are simply misinterpreted by the Moors before being correctly glossed by the narrator or his Christian characters.<sup>35</sup> In this context, Corippus also refers to the *numen* (pl. *numina*) ('authority' or 'will') of the gods, another inheritance from the epic tradition.<sup>36</sup> Corippus only ever uses this term to refer to pagan deities, either in accounts of divine possession or to describe impulse which acted upon the Moors and ultimately drove them to their defeat, but here again we have some sense of wider powers acting on the human protagonists of the drama.<sup>37</sup> While the poet repeatedly laments the deception of these *numina*, the precise theological implications of these supernatural powers – whether fate or divine will – are never closely interrogated in the poem.<sup>38</sup> Corippus probably shared the widespread Christian assumption that pagan gods and their oracles had a demonic power which could be considerable but was wholly subordinate to power of God, and which would ultimately be defeated by Him.<sup>39</sup> Whatever his understanding, it seems likely that Corippus' literary concerns here took precedence over the theological consistency of his poem.<sup>40</sup>

While epic convention accorded a central role to *numina*, *fata* and *sortes*, on occasion this was explicitly recast in a Christian context. In the catalogue of Book II, for example, the poet alludes to the coming the defeat of the Romans at Marta, but makes clear that even this temporary success was ordained by God:

The Roman band might have avoided the sight of these unhappy fields, if only fate – so often enemy to the good – had allowed them to break its deadly threads. But this was pleasing to You, Highest Father, and what Your orders demanded.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> Andres (1993), 330, identifies fifteen uses of the term in the *Iohannis* (excluding Ioh V.42 and VI.342–3). Andres (1994) discusses its significance in the poem.

<sup>37</sup> The possible exceptions are *Ioh* V.42 *numine Christus* and VI.342–3 *numen pius*. For preferred readings, see Andres (1994), 72–4, following Goodyear (1962), 39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ioh* II.112; III.182; VIII.301, 316, 619. Andres (1994), 69.

<sup>39</sup> Compare Corippus, *Iust* III.375–9, following (for example), Tertullian *Ad Nationes* II.8; Lactantius, *Instit.* IV.27; Augustine, *De Civ Dei* IX.19–22, and *De Div Daem.* and the poetic treatments in Prudentius, *Apoth* 438–9, 469, *Perist.* I.97–111. On this sentiment, see Zarini (1996), 128–35; Zarini (2010), 95–6.

<sup>40</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 147.

<sup>41</sup> *Ioh* II.81–4: *tristes quos cernere campos | uitasset Romana manus, si fata dedissent, inuida saepe bonis, letalia rumpere fila: | sic tibi, summe pater, placuit, sic iussa ferebant.* Riedlberger (2010), 152 is sceptical of this connection, for reasons which are not clear.

When the conflict at Marta finally arrives, the point is reiterated in very similar language:

In vain, the well ordered troop went out, because the fates pressed down upon them. But this was pleasing to You, Highest Father, for You wished to punish the sinful people of Libya. Their faults were the cause of many evils, and the guilt is not that of their ruler.<sup>42</sup>

If the conventions of epic demanded that the poet or his characters talk of fate and fortune, Corippus was at pains to emphasize that only the Christian God retains a power over the events that he narrates.<sup>43</sup>

These elements cohere in the four extended prayers which punctuate the *Iohannis*, and where Christian themes are addressed most directly.<sup>44</sup> All are of a fairly consistent length, systematically structured and rhetorically sophisticated, and might justifiably be regarded as Christian poems in their own right.<sup>45</sup> Earlier epics had included direct appeals to the gods, of course, and Corippus often uses the conventional vocabulary of *templa*, *sacerdotes* and *munera*, but the prayers themselves are longer and more systematically structured than those in the classical epics.<sup>46</sup> They often appear at turning points in the narrative, hence they re-establish the unfolding story and its participants within the wider Christian universe. The first prayer is made amidst the storm of Book I, and in it John succinctly articulates the divine order in the universe, the Christian structure of the epic and his own role as the servant of God's will:

The sorrowful commander groaned and raised his thoughts to the heavens; with piety as his teacher, compelled by fear, he asked for God's help through his tears. Prostrate and begging as a suppliant, he began with these words: 'All-Powerful Father of the Word and Creator of things, Beginning without end! God: all things declare You their Author, Lord and Maker, the elements tremble before You. The winds and clouds shake with fear before

<sup>42</sup> *Ioh* VI.547–50: *it bene compta manus frustra, quia fata premebant. | sic placitum tibi, summe pater, dum laedere uelles | peccantes Libyae populos. delicta fuere | tanti causa mali, fuerat non culpa regentis.*

<sup>43</sup> Compare for example John's references to *fatum* and *fortuna* in *Ioh* III.418 and IV.420–1. *Fatum* is also commonly evoked in the historical overview in Liberatus' analepsis. Especially *Ioh* III.184, 194, 201, 224 (on the fall of the Vandal kingdom) and III.338, 427. John's declaration in *Ioh* IV.420–38 that *fortuna* had always supported Rome is a further illustration of the elusiveness of the concept in the *Iohannis*.

<sup>44</sup> The prayers have been the subject of several excellent studies, and the brief discussion that follows is heavily indebted to them. See especially Ramirez-Tirado (1988), Tommasi Moreschini (2004–5) and Bureau (2015).

<sup>45</sup> Hofmann (1989) explores this point. Ramirez-Tirado (1988) identifies structural patterns.

<sup>46</sup> Compare for example the short prayers in Virg. *Aen* I.93–101; II.689–91; V.686–92; X.252–5; XI.483–5. On linguistic similarities, see Shea (1973), 121.

You, the air serves You, the highest aether thunders to Your power, and the very structure of the world is shaken. You know, Almighty Father, You foreknow all things before they happen. I am not drawn to Libya because I desire gold, or so that I might gain some reward, but so that I can end the war and save the souls of the wretched. This is my sole wish, this is the only hope of my spirit. And it is only for this reason that the benevolent emperor orders me to go. Our emperor rules with You as *his* Emperor, and he himself admits that he owes You due service by Your nature: You make us his subjects and command us to serve him: I have therefore followed Your precepts.<sup>47</sup>

Much the same pattern is apparent in Corippus' other prayer sequences. Prior to the battle at Antonia Castra, John prays again, and he once more stresses the power of the Creator over the universe and specifically over the fates of the *gentes*. Here, the general presents himself as the principal channel between the earthly world and the divine and hence – yet again – as an agent of God's will:

You, Creator of the world, pacify the *gentes* and calm their wars, you crush their impious armies, and as is your custom aid our actions. Behold the towns set on fire by these hard-hearted *gentes*, Almighty, and regard the fields. For no ploughman cultivates his fields now: no priest can offer his tears in the temples on behalf of the people. In the mountains, all are bound in hard chains, their hands tied behind their backs. Behold Sacred Father, and do not delay Your thunderbolts. Stretch out the crowds of the Moors beneath our feet, snatch away the captive *Afri* from these savage *gentes*, acknowledge Your dear Romans as you always do in your goodness, and in favouring us turn our sorrows to joy.<sup>48</sup>

John's third prayer comes in the aftermath of the defeat at Marta, at the start of Book VII. Cosmic order is again asserted – John refers here to

<sup>47</sup> *Ioh* I.282–300: *ingenuit ductor mentemque ad sidera tristis | erigit auxiliumque dei pietate magistra, | ut metus ipse dabat, lacrimis inquiri obortis, | pronus et exorans supplex his uocibus infit: | 'omnipotens uerbi genitor rerumque creator, | principium sine fine, deus, te cuncta fatentur | auctorem et dominum, factorem elementa tremescunt, | te uenti nubesque pauent, tibi militat aer, | imperioque tuo nunc arduus intonat aether | magnaue concussi turbatur machina mundi. | tu scis, summe pater, tu praescius omnia nosti: | non auri cupidus, non ullo munere lucri | in Libyam compulsus eo, sed scindere bellum | et miseris saluare animas. haec sola cupido | hic animis amor omnis inest, huc iussio tantum | principis alma trahit. noster te principe princeps | imperat. ipse tibi meritum debere fatetur | ordine seruitium; tu illi nos subicis omnes | et seruire iubes; tua sum praeepta secutus'.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ioh* IV.272–84: *tu conditor orbis, | tu gentes et bella domas, tu conteris arma | impia, tu nostris solitus succurrere rebus. | aspice succensas duris a gentibus urbes, | omnipotens, agrosque uide. iam nullus arator | arua colit: lacrimas nullus per templa sacerdos | pro populo iam ferre potest. nam montibus omnes | uincola dura ferunt palmis post terga reuinctis. | aspice, sancte pater, nec iam tua fulmina cessent. | sub nostris pedibus Maurorum sterne cateruas, | eripe captiuos saeuis a gentibus Afros, | Romanosque tuos solite miseratus alumnos | cerne pius, nostrosque fauens fac gaudia luctus.*



God's power over the passing of the seasons and the hours of the day – and this is once more related to the unfolding drama of the epic. John prays above all that he might be given strength to save Libya, and he is confident that this will eventually come to pass.<sup>49</sup>

It is significant that the final prayer of the *Iohannis* comes before the climactic battle and is undertaken collectively. The Christian ceremony prior to Campi Catonis is interesting for a number of reasons, not least its pointed contrast to the 'pagan' Moorish ceremonies of the previous night.<sup>50</sup> Here, order is manifested through the ceremony and the participation of a wide array of the army within the worship:

In the centre of the camp, near where the leader John had his tent of stretched canvas among the most important, the priest set up a great altar, dressed it and surrounded it on all sides with sacred hangings, according to the usual custom of the ancestors. His deacons formed themselves into choirs and, weeping, sang sweet hymns with humble voice. But when the leader came to the threshold of this sacred temple and entered, the people broke out in groans of sadness and their eyes were clouded with tears.<sup>51</sup>

The prayer reprises the themes already addressed in earlier prayers: God's position as Creator and source of all order in the universe, and his power over the rebellious tribes:

You alone have the power (*imperium*), Yours is the greatest power and the praise, and the sovereignty and strength of Your right hand. Look down at last upon the Romans, look down oh pious Almighty Father, and help us. I beseech You: vanquish these proud *gentes* with Your strength. The peoples shall know You alone as Almighty Lord, since You destroy Your enemies and saves Your own in war. And so [our] race condemns every idol, and we confess You the One, True Great God.<sup>52</sup>

Corippus places particular emphasis on the attitude of those praying in each episode. John and other Roman supplicants raise their hands to heaven, often fall to the ground, and typically end their prayers in floods

<sup>49</sup> *Ioh* VII.88–103. On this prayer, see Sannicandro (2015). <sup>50</sup> *Ioh* VIII.300–17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ioh* VIII.324–32: *dux ubi distensis habuit tentoria uelis | una cum primis media inter castra Iohannes, | hic magnum statuit uelans altare sacerdos | et solito sacris circumdedit undique peplis | more patrum: instituuntque choros et dulcia psallunt | carmina deflentes humili cum uoce ministri. | ast ubi sacrati tetigit dux limina templi | ingrediens, gemitus populi rupere dolentes. | lumina confundunt lacrimis.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ioh* VIII.346–53: *imperium tu solus habes, tibi summa potestas | et laus et regnum magnaue potentia dextrae. | respice iam tandem Romanos, respice, summe, | atque pius succurre, pater, gentesque superbas | frange, precor, uirtute tua: dominumque potentem | te solum agnoscant populi, dum conteris hostes | et saluas per bella tuos. nunc sculptile damnat | omne genus, uerumque deum te, magne fatemur. As Riedlberger (2010), 330, notes there is an echo of the closing lines of the *pater noster* in the opening of this prayer.*

of tears.<sup>53</sup> Although commentators have sometimes suggested that this was a specifically eastern form of prayer, and was intended to be read as such, this seems not to have been the case: funerary mosaics from Vandal Africa depict prayer with palms raised in precisely this manner, as Peter Riedlberger has noted, and Aeneas also prays ‘with palms to heaven’.<sup>54</sup> What is most significant, however, is the emphasis on the absolute humility of those at prayer.

Corippus’ universe was an ordered one in which God was all powerful. Disorder might be caused by human sinfulness, but all would eventually be brought back into the fold. The emperor and his loyal servants are presented as important agents within this, and many of the panegyric passages in Book I represent the imperial court as a terrestrial manifestation of this cosmic order, not least through the despatch of John’s expedition to Africa.<sup>55</sup> This symbiosis of state and religious power drew upon a long tradition of Roman political thought, particularly in the eastern capital.<sup>56</sup> Such thinking had a more chequered history in North Africa, not least because of the long shadow cast by Augustine and the impact of the Vandal occupation during the fifth and early sixth centuries. Nevertheless, the imperial conquest in 533 created a context in which secular power might once more be regarded warmly. While Corippus certainly viewed certain aspects of the imperial occupation with ambivalence, as we have seen, John’s triumphant expedition revealed the divine will – and the imperial will – at work together.

### *Christian North Africa in the Iohannis*

For all of its Christian underpinnings, Corippus’ *Iohannis* was not directly concerned with the religious institutions of Byzantine North Africa. Modern historians are blessed with a comparative wealth of evidence on this topic, from the developing archaeological testimony of church

<sup>53</sup> There are twenty-eight references to tears in the *Iohannis*, and the great majority relate to religious worship. As Hays (2016), 270, remarks, ‘all of Corippus’ characters weep copiously at the drop of a helmet’. This makes John’s decision to upbraid his troops for excessive crying at *Ioh* VII.118–20 seem especially unfair.

<sup>54</sup> Cameron (1982), 22, detects Byzantine practices here, and compare Hofmann (1989), 366. See now Riedlberger (2010), 323, citing *CIL* VIII 2013; Virg. *Aen* 1.93: *ad sidera palmas* and *Aen* XII.196: *ad sidera dextram*. See also Bureau (2015), 222–3. The same attitude, incidentally, is depicted in painted slab from the tumulus necropolis at Djorf Torba near Bechar on the modern Algerian/Moroccan border; see Hamdoune (2018), 368, and at Ghirza in the Wadi Zemzem. See Nikolaus (2017), 88–9. Ghirza is discussed further later in this chapter.

<sup>55</sup> *Ioh* I.125–58.

<sup>56</sup> Zarini (2010), 96, terms this ‘une sorte d’eusébianisme vulgarisé’. Dagron (2003) is the classic introduction to the original.

building and restoration to the copious theological writing of the period.<sup>57</sup> The picture that emerges is of a complex institution defined by a strong network of more than 200 bishops, but also shaped by local and provincial rivalries, struggles over authority and lasting memories of dogmatic disputes and persecution which had lingered for centuries.<sup>58</sup> Recent studies have shown that the major divisions within the post-Roman church in North Africa were also less straightforward than was previously thought: the struggles between ‘Catholics’ and ‘Donatists’, ‘Nicenes’ and ‘Arians’, and the different parties in the Three Chapters controversy were at once much more fluid and rather longer-lasting than scholars had commonly assumed.<sup>59</sup> Corippus sheds little obvious light on any of this. He makes no reference to the heretical ‘Arianism’ of the Vandals, nor to the imperial representation of the occupation as a restoration of the True Church. Nor is any direct reference made to the Three Chapters crisis, which was enveloping the African church at the time of his composition. In many ways, this simply reflects the subject matter of Corippus’ work and the form in which he wrote: there was little space in a military epic for extended discussion on the nature of the Godhead or authority within the church. Even explicitly ‘Christian’ poems in late antiquity rarely tackled doctrinal themes directly: they were generally more concerned to celebrate God’s creation than they were to unpack questions of theology.<sup>60</sup> But in spite of these silences, the *Iohannis* remains a noteworthy testimony on the position of the church within early imperial Africa.

Corippus’ treatment of the African episcopate is particularly illuminating. Three bishops or senior clerics feature within the *Iohannis*. None is named, but two are clearly recognizable, and this is important. The first appears in the aftermath of John’s first triumph in Book VI. Following the parade of the Moorish captives before the eyes of the Carthaginian populace, John and his troops come to make the final thanksgiving for their success:

And as the fathers and mothers delighted to point out these horrible faces to their little children, the benevolent leader came to the

<sup>57</sup> On the historiography of religion in Byzantine North Africa, particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, see now Merrills (2021b), 369–78.

<sup>58</sup> Helpful overviews in: Modéran (1998); Merrills and Miles (2010), 234–52; Leone (2011–12). And see the important discussion in Kaiser (2007), 68–154.

<sup>59</sup> The bibliography is substantial, but see especially Rebillard (2011); Shaw (2011); Whelan (2018). The historiography is outlined in Merrills (2021b), 377–8.

<sup>60</sup> There are exceptions, including the versification of the Creed from the Council of Constantinople in Corippus, *Iust.* II.51–69 and IV.292–311 and the allusions to Trinitarian doctrine in Dracontius, *DLD.* II.60–110, but these are unusual. See Whelan (2018), 206–10, for a further note of caution on the significance of the latter.

threshold of the church with his accompanying banners. He prayed to the Lord of heaven, earth and seas, and dedicated an offering, which the high priest, placed on the altar in the traditional way, for the return of the leader and the defeat of the enemy. The father dedicated these offerings to Christ.<sup>61</sup>

The presence of the *sacerdos* establishes clearly that John's triumph was a Christian ceremony. As we saw in Chapter 3, Corippus' account of this episode anticipates the later triumphal celebrations which followed the victory of 548, and it is reasonable to assume that the later triumph also retained these strong Christian elements. The reference to the officiant as both *sacerdos* and *pater* strongly implies that this figure was Reparatus, who was bishop of Carthage in 546 (and remained so until after 551).<sup>62</sup> In this way, both the church and its most prominent figurehead were connected to John's military successes.

The second portrait appears in Liberatus' account of his mission to Iunci in Book VII. In one of the most gripping passages in the epic, Liberatus recalls his adventures on entering the troubled town, which had resisted the besieging Moors in spite of its paltry physical defences.<sup>63</sup> His report describes the miraculous preservation of the city and the extraordinary power of the words of a local priest:

That man could tame rabid lions and calm ferocious beasts with his words; the hearts of wolves are soothed by them, and they do not harm tender lambs with their ravening jaws. At the same time, he exhorts you to order a swift pursuit, believing that if you come the Roman cause would be successful. He will not cease his tearful prayers on behalf of your people and arms and Latin defences, perpetually begging the Almighty to crush our enemies and humiliate the proud with His strength.<sup>64</sup>

This passage once more presents the anticipated victories of the Roman army within a wholly Christian context and connects the salvation of the city with the power of prayer.

<sup>61</sup> *Ioh* VI.97–103: *horribiles uultus paruīs ostendere natis | dum patres matresque libet, sic limina templi | magnanimus ductor signis comitantibus intrans | orauit dominum caeli terraeque marisque, | obtulit et munus, summus quod more sacerdos | pro redituque ducis pro uictisque hostibus arae | imposuit, Christoque pater libamina sanxit.*

<sup>62</sup> Vict. Tun. a.551; he was succeeded by Primosus, who took office in 554 (Vict. Tun. a.554).

<sup>63</sup> *Ioh* VII.475–97.

<sup>64</sup> *Ioh* VII 486–94: *ille potest monitis rabidos lenire leones | et placare feras. mansuescunt corda luporum | atque auidis teneros non laedunt morsibus agnos. | hortaturque simul iubeas properare sequendo, | proelia Romanis confidens prospera rebus, | si uenias. lacrimis non desinet ille precando | pro populis armisque tuis castrisque Latinis, | exorans iugiter nostros ut conterat hostes | omnipotens humiletque sua uirtute superbos.*

The bishop is emphatically the mainstay of local resistance, and he is also the only civic leader mentioned in the poem; it is he, after all, who advises John on the next steps he might take to deal with the Moorish threat.

The Christian priest is almost certainly Verecundus of Iunci, who is first attested in 534 and had become bishop of the city by 551.<sup>65</sup> Verecundus was a Christian poet of some repute, and his appearance here as a new Orpheus was evidently intended as a complement from one writer to another.<sup>66</sup> Many of his works are now lost, but among those to have survived was *De Poenitentia* (*On Repentance*). This work opens (in Greg Hays's translation):

Who will grant me to bloody with showers of tears my grieving face  
In weeping, and constantly to furnish my weary cheeks  
With a mournful stream, and to drench my eyes in moisture,  
With heart contrite and furrowed brow:<sup>67</sup>

It is not known when *De Poenitentia* was written, but a composition in the 540s seems plausible: Liberatus' portrait of a tearful bishop could thus be read as a direct reference to a well-known poem, creating a neat in-joke in a short section already replete with intertextual notes.<sup>68</sup> The final poetic allusion underscores the shared heritage of the author and his subject, as well as the loyalty of Verecundus (and hence of the episcopate as a whole) to the imperial project. In emphasizing his desire to see God 'crush our enemies and humiliate the proud with His strength', the bishop makes another explicit reference to the Virgilian motif of *parcere subiectos*, which runs throughout the *Iohannis*, as we have seen.

A third senior cleric also appears in the poem, but is impossible to identify. This individual takes the Christian service prior to the climactic battle at Campi Catonis in Book VIII.<sup>69</sup> As we saw, the service seems to have taken place in a dedicated tent, around a portable altar.<sup>70</sup> John and his senior officers were all in attendance, but so too were an unspecified number of churchmen as well as the presiding *summus sacerdos*. It is not clear whether this individual was a regimental chaplain permanently posted to the senior command, or a bishop, but the elevated title suggests the latter.<sup>71</sup> Corippus certainly emphasizes his role in order to establish the

<sup>65</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2013b), 1849.

<sup>66</sup> Note here the more direct use of the same motif in Dracontius, *Rom.* I.

<sup>67</sup> Verecundus, *De Poen.* 1–4; tr. in Hays (2016), 289.

<sup>68</sup> Tommasi Moreschini (2013b), 1849; Hays (2016), 170. Cameron (1982), 44, argues that the contrite theme of the poem may date it to Verecundus' imprisonment in Constantinople after 551.

<sup>69</sup> *Ioh.* VIII.321–64.

<sup>70</sup> *Ioh.* VIII.324–9. Riedlberger (2010), 315–19, discusses the setting in detail.

<sup>71</sup> *Ioh.* VIII.363–7; Riedlberger (2010), 335.

orthodoxy of the military service, and to contrast it further with the pagan rituals of the Moorish army, which had taken place the previous evening and will be discussed in more detail in what follows.<sup>72</sup>

### *Corippus and the Three Chapters Controversy*

It is remarkable that we can identify two of the three senior clerics named in the *Iohannis*, not least because of their particular importance in the major religious crisis of this period. In 551, Reparatus of Carthage and Verecundus of Iunci were summoned to Constantinople, along with Firmus of Tipasa, who was Primate of Numidia and Bishop Primasius of Hadrumetum.<sup>73</sup> This marked a significant escalation in a simmering dispute between the imperial church and those in the new western provinces.<sup>74</sup> The four African bishops went to Constantinople to explain their resistance to a series of edicts Justinian had issued between 543 and 545 in an attempt to bring unity to the church. The emperor's instructions condemned some of the writings of the fifth-century theologians Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa, which had been approved in the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but which had since been contested by factions within the eastern church (these were the 'three chapters' which gave the dispute its name). As they readily admitted, the Latin theologians of Africa and Italy were unfamiliar with the precise contents of the writings under discussion, which were written in Greek, and they had also been spared the anguish of the Miaphysite and Monothelite schisms Justinian's edicts were intended to address.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the principle of imperial intervention in doctrinal matters was strongly resisted by western churchmen: in their view, the church in council should hold supreme religious authority, not the emperor, and the right to interpret scripture should be the privilege of the bishops themselves.<sup>76</sup>

Under pressure from a noisy African faction in 547, Pope Vigilius I initially opposed Justinian's edicts, but reversed his position following a summons to Constantinople and a period of imprisonment. Many African churchmen were horrified at this backsliding and condemned the Pope in a regional council in Carthage in 550 – the first full meeting of the

<sup>72</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 294.   <sup>73</sup> Vict. Tun. a.551.

<sup>74</sup> Pewesin (1937) is the classic modern study. See Chazelle and Cubitt (2007) for an important overview, and see especially the chapter by Modéran (2007). See also Maas (2003), 42–64; Conant (2012), 316–24; Dossey (2016).

<sup>75</sup> Ep. Pont. 997. On the intellectual divide between the eastern and western churches at this time, compare Maas (2003), 16–30.

<sup>76</sup> Dossey (2016).

African church in fifteen years.<sup>77</sup> In the aftermath of this council, the four African spokesmen travelled to Constantinople, where they faced considerable pressure from Justinian. Of those who travelled to the capital, Firmus recanted and was allowed to return to his diocese in Africa (he died on the trip home); Primasius of Hadrumetum also seems to have relented after a period in monastic imprisonment and he too returned to Africa.<sup>78</sup> Only Reparatus and Verecundus stood firm, but both died in exile, the former charged with treason for his part in the Guntharith revolt in 546.<sup>79</sup> Their resistance accomplished little: Justinian's position was reiterated and formalized at the Council of Constantinople in 553, and more sympathetic bishops were systematically promoted within the African church.<sup>80</sup>

Much of our evidence for the crisis within North Africa comes from the copious writing of those who defended the Three Chapters, including the letters of Pontianus of Thena and the Carthaginian deacon Ferrandus, Facundus of Hermiane's massive *Defence of the Three Chapters*, and the *Chronicle* of Victor of Tunnuna, which charts the crisis as it unfolded.<sup>81</sup> Stirring though much of this material is, support for the rebel position seems to have dwindled over the course of the next fifteen years. North African dioceses were increasingly occupied by bishops sympathetic to the imperial position and resistance atrophied, especially in Numidia.<sup>82</sup> Victor makes much of the clubs and staves used by Primosus of Carthage to enforce imperial orthodoxy and connects this to the brutal persecutions of the past, but violence of this kind may not have been needed very often.<sup>83</sup> By the end of Justinian's reign, the crisis in Africa seems to have petered out.

The relationship between the *Iohannis* and the unfolding Three Chapters crisis remains something of a puzzle, and our ignorance on the precise date of its composition compounds this problem. The epic was certainly completed and performed in the months after John's final victory at Campi Catonis in 548, but it is impossible to be more precise than that. The fact that Reparatus and Verecundus opposed the imperial position in Constantinople after 551, and may have been

<sup>77</sup> Vict. Tun. a. 550. Modéran (2007), 48–52.      <sup>78</sup> Vict. Tun. a. 552.2.

<sup>79</sup> See *Letter of the Milanese Clergy* tr. in Price (2009), 165–70; Vict. Tun. a. 552. Compare Modéran (2007), 51.

<sup>80</sup> Documents relating to the Council are helpfully translated (with commentary) in Price (2009).

<sup>81</sup> See especially Solignac (2005). Placanica (1997), i–xxxi, provides an excellent introduction to Victor as well as an annotated edition of the *Chronicle*. See Marone (2014) for a brisk overview of the principal textual sources.

<sup>82</sup> Markus (1966), 144; Conant (2012), 322–3.      <sup>83</sup> Vict. Tun. a. 556.1.

seen as politically toxic thereafter, may imply that Corippus completed his poem before that date, but this is not completely secure.<sup>84</sup> After all, the two bishops were hardly uncontentious figures before that date: both had been central to the solidification of the African position in defence of the Three Chapters from 547 and so must have been associated with the developing schism whenever the poem was written. It has sometimes been suggested that Corippus wrote his poem as a sort of secular counterweight to the escalating religious tensions of the time: Averil Cameron argued that the *Iohannis* is best read as a declaration of loyalty to the imperial regime in the face of this crisis, and that its 'bland and pious' Christianity helped sidestep particular points of contention.<sup>85</sup> But the presence of Verecundus and Reparatus – even unnamed – must complicate such a reading significantly.

It is perhaps more accurate to say that the *Iohannis* reflects the degree to which political loyalty and doctrinal debate were still being worked out in the 540s and early 550s in the fevered atmosphere of Byzantine Carthage. Victor of Tunnuna was later to reframe the controversy as the story of African resistance to the inappropriate meddling of the imperial state, and it is often tempting to connect this crisis to the comparable tensions which had surfaced in Africa during the Donatist schism of the fourth century, or the persecution under the Vandals in the late fifth and early sixth centuries.<sup>86</sup> But the African churchmen of the 540s were often at pains to protest their loyalty to the emperor even when they opposed his doctrinal policy: they emphasized that their concerns were primarily over the authority to interpret scripture and not over secular power more broadly.<sup>87</sup> In this context, it is conspicuous that both Reparatus and Verecundus are closely associated with Roman military success in the *Iohannis*, and their appearances are connected directly to the recurrent themes of victory through consensus that run throughout the *Iohannis*. Reparatus is the presiding religious figure in the triumph at the start of Book VI, and may well have performed a similar role in the

<sup>84</sup> Thus: Tommasi Moreschini (2013a), 835.

<sup>85</sup> Cameron (1984), Corippus' Christians are 'bland and pious to the point of tedium' at 168. Compare Zarini (2005), 417–19, Kern (2007) and Tommasi Moreschini (2017), who addresses the presence of Verecundus in the poem at 203–5.

<sup>86</sup> Compare for example Markus (1966); Eno (1976); Modéran (2007).

<sup>87</sup> Most obviously: Pontianus' *Ad Iustinianum* (PL 67: 995–8); Price (2009), 111–12; Conant (2012), 316–24. Dossey (2016) is crucial here. Compare also Meier (2010) and Blaudeau (2015) on the political position of Liberatus' *Breviarium* – a summary of theological issues written circa 555/6 – which (they argue) was also at pains to present a positive image of Justinian.



final celebrations at the close of John's campaign. Verecundus is both focal in the defence of Iunci and reformulates the Virgilian refrain *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* in his prayers, thereby establishing clearly his loyalty to the imperial programme in the form in which this was most commonly articulated in the *Iohannis*. The appearances of these bishops should thus be read, not simply as a papering over of an unpleasant doctrinal squabble, but rather as an assertion of the underlying loyalty of African churchmen, in spite of these difficulties. This may have been an easier position for Corippus to take before 551, but this defence of two prominent figures may have been equally helpful after that date, when the religious tensions in Africa were at their most acute. In the event, the *Iohannis* may not have represented a particularly significant intervention, and the poem could do little to help either Verecundus or Reparatus, but there is some indication that it responded to contemporary circumstances, even if only obliquely.

### Moorish Religion

Corippus' portrait of Moorish paganism is a more arresting prospect than his image of Christianity, and its significance is magnified by the relative paucity of other evidence on this important subject. As a source on this topic, the *Iohannis* is marked by the same strengths and weaknesses as its ethnography more broadly. It includes a mass of invaluable detail, much of it unique to the poem, including the names of specific gods and hints at the political importance of their cults, as well as several extended accounts of oracular consultations and ritual sacrifices. In many cases, this information is probably trustworthy: it is hard to imagine Corippus completely inventing material of this kind, not least because he wrote for a North African audience who would have had some knowledge of this world.<sup>88</sup> The topic may also have been one of enduring interest for the poet: a work identified as 'A most splendid poem on the Gods of the *Gentes*' (*de diis gentium luculentissimum Carmen*) is attributed to 'Cresconius' in the mid-ninth-century library catalogue from the monastery of Lorsch.<sup>89</sup> If this was our author, that poem may well have focused particularly on the Moorish gods (*Dii Mauri*), and its loss is greatly to be regretted. Yet in spite of his likely interest in this topic, Corippus' treatment of Moorish religion in the *Iohannis* continued to draw heavily on existing poetic models, and the

<sup>88</sup> Zarini (2006), 56. <sup>89</sup> See Hofmann (1989), 371–2, on this work.

subject is often presented through thick Virgilian (and Lucanian) lenses. As ever, navigating this material poses innumerable challenges.

The following section looks first at the representations of specific gods within the *Iohannis*, their names and function within the text, and how these details correspond to our other evidence on African paganism at this time; it then discusses the long oracle episodes in similar terms. These passages have already been discussed briefly for their narrative function: here, we look at their value as evidence for religious practice during this period.<sup>90</sup> Of necessity, this discussion draws upon a range of other evidence – archaeological, epigraphic and textual – to illuminate the information provided within the *Iohannis*, but there are dangers in this approach. One of the most common uses of the poem in modern scholarship has been to aid the construction of a composite image of ‘Moorish religion’, which is sometimes assumed to have continued more or less unchanged from late prehistory to the arrival of Islam (and beyond). The final section of this chapter seeks to disrupt such readings and situates the *Iohannis* firmly in the specific context of the mid-sixth century. While the worship of particular gods probably provided an important rallying point for ‘Moorish’ political and social cohesion in this period, and might have drawn together groups from quite disparate regions, Corippus’ particular emphasis on Ammon, Gurzil and the other gods may have been connected to an imperial programme of evangelism which followed John’s final victory in 548.

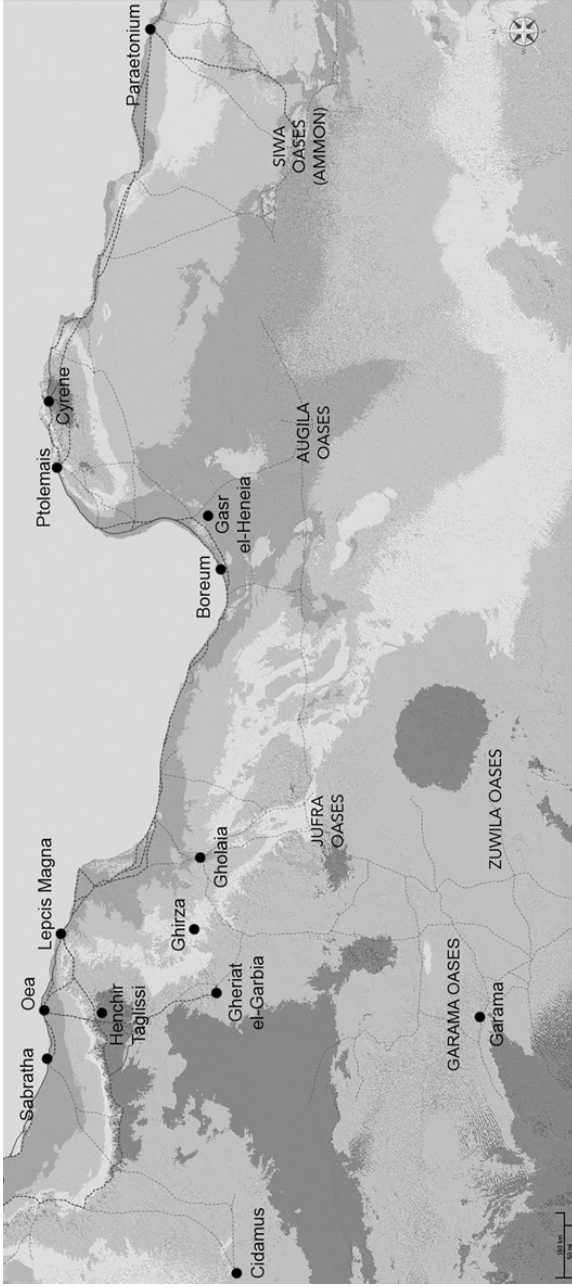
### *Ammon*

Ammon and Gurzil are the two most prominent Moorish gods within the *Iohannis*, and they appear as the principal religious foci for the rebellious barbarians. Ammon was a familiar presence across North Africa and the Sahara, and is the only Moorish god in the *Iohannis* attested securely outside the poem. He was associated most closely with the cult centre at Siwa, deep in the Western Desert of Egypt – which was often known by his name – but this worship had spread considerably by late antiquity.<sup>91</sup> The origins of the cult have been variously traced to Thebes, Nubia or within the Sahara, and this attests to the overlapping patterns of acculturation and syncretism which shaped religious practice across this part of the ancient world.<sup>92</sup> From the

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>91</sup> See Wagner (1987), 208–12, on Siwa specifically, and 329–34 on the worship of Ammon in the other Egyptian oases. See Kuhlmann (1988) for the archaeology of Siwa, and Kuhlmann (1998) on the oasis down to the Byzantine period. Fakhry (1990) remains essential on Siwa.

<sup>92</sup> See Parke (1967), 194–236, for the overview.



Map 6.1. Locations in Tripolitania, Syrtica, Pentapolis and the Sahara mentioned in the text

fifth century BCE, the Greek colonists in Cyrenaica were making reference to a Libyan cult they associated with Zeus, and the well-attested visit of Alexander the Great to Siwa in the fourth century magnified this reputation dramatically.<sup>93</sup> Thereafter, the oracle of Ammon enjoyed a prominent position in the religious imagination of the Mediterranean world. The spread of the cult to the west may have been accelerated by a partial syncretism with the Punic Baal-Hammon and by local cults across the Sahara and the Maghreb, but this is far from certain.<sup>94</sup> Ammon was conventionally represented as a ram, and this also facilitated connections to widespread North African religious practices centred upon that animal.<sup>95</sup> Ammon temples are attested epigraphically and archaeologically across the oases and throughout Syrtica and Tripolitania, but the precise extent of the cult is often difficult to assess.<sup>96</sup> When Latin poets and geographers refer to the worship of Ammon 'among the Garamantes', for example, it is hard to know whether this relates to the adoption of the cult in Fezzan specifically (the traditional homeland of that group), the imprecise language used in classical descriptions of the desert or the general sense that the god permeated the whole of this world: it is certainly possible that all are true.<sup>97</sup>

Ammon's position in the *Iohannis* reflects these ambiguities quite well. Throughout the poem, the god is presented as an overarching divine presence, as well as the focus of specific rituals. It is Ammon, rather than any of the lesser gods, who is the presiding deity in both of the prophetic episodes, which are much the longest descriptions of Moorish pagan practice within the *Iohannis*. The first of these occurs at the start of Liberatus' digression in Book III, when Antalas' father, Guenfan, takes his infant son

<sup>93</sup> Hdt I.46; II.42; Plut., *Alex.* 28.

<sup>94</sup> See Le Glay (1966), 107–52; Mattingly (1995), 38–9. Tommasi Moreschini (2002c) further discusses the implications of the syncretism with Baal-Hammon as it relates to the *Iohannis*, but her conclusion (that the epic is evidence for ongoing Saturn worship in the sixth century) is not convincing. On Corippus' treatment of Ammon, see now Tommasi (2021), 66–8.

<sup>95</sup> See for example Athanasius *Contra Gentes* 24; Macrob. *Sat.* I.21.19; Mart Cap, II.157 and *Ioh* II.110 with the references that follow. The evidence for ram worship among the Moors (or 'Berbers') in antiquity is less substantial than is often assumed, (and much of it post-dates the spread of the Ammon cult). Le Glay (1966), 421–3, assembles the evidence, and defines this at 421 as 'un de ces problèmes redoutables qu'on n'aborde qu'en tremblant'. Compare also Germain (1948) for an overview and the observations in Bénabou (1976), 276–8.

<sup>96</sup> Goodchild (1951–76); Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 130–56, 255–65. Virg. *Aen* IV.198–200 refers to the 'hundred shrines' built to Jupiter Ammon across Libya. Synesius, *Ep.* 73.25 may indicate the continued relevance of the oracle in early fifth-century Pentapolis; compare Synesius, *De insomniis* 143D; Russell (2014), 34.

<sup>97</sup> Compare for example Luc. *BC* IX.511–12 (almost certainly referring to Siwa); Sil Ital. *Pun* II.58; Sid. Ap. *Carm.* IX.50–1. See Parke (1967), 242–50, on poetic accounts of Ammon. This material is briefly surveyed in Mattingly (2003), 76–9.

to the oracle to learn of his future; in the second, Carcasan turns to the god for support in his own military campaign in Book VI. In each Ammon is conflated directly with Jupiter or Jove, a long-standing syncretism:

[Antalas'] father went to the false temple of Ammon. Then, enquiring about the terrible fate of his evil son, he sacrificed horrid offerings to Jove in sacrilegious fashion.<sup>98</sup>

[Carcasan] went to the edges of Marmaridan territory, where Corniger Ammon lives, and sought a reply from cruel Jove.<sup>99</sup>

The long accounts of the consultations themselves are important, and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but the overarching cosmology implied here is also revealing. Both Antalas and Carcasan subsequently justify their own actions as responses to Ammon's will.<sup>100</sup> Antalas presents himself implicitly as the *armiger*, or bodyguard, of Jupiter in his speech in Book IV.<sup>101</sup> Other references to this cult are few: Ammon is included among the Moorish gods worshipped before the battle in Book VIII, but only in a minor position. The god is repeatedly given the epithet *corniger* ('horned') in the *Iohannis*, and knowledge of his common representation as a ram seems to have been assumed.<sup>102</sup> There are also allusions to a sacred ram (*aries*) in John Troglita's punning boasts of Book II, but this may be related to the representations of Gurzil.<sup>103</sup>

### *Gurzil*

Gurzil is a more immediate presence than Ammon within the *Iohannis*. This god does not appear in any other source, but his prominence in Corippus' poem has led scholars to assume that he must have had an important position within the local pantheon, and perhaps was the major deity of the region around the Syrtic Gulf.<sup>104</sup> Corippus is explicit that the

<sup>98</sup> *Iob* III.81–4: *namque Ammonis ipse | templa petit simulata pater. tunc prolis iniquae | fata tremenda rogans mactat de more profano | horrida sacra Ioui.*

<sup>99</sup> *Iob* VI.147–8: *Marmaridum fines, habitat quo corniger Ammon, | inde petit, durique Iouis responsa poposcit.*

<sup>100</sup> *Iob* VI.116–18; VI. 556–7; VII.513–15; VII.534–6. <sup>101</sup> *Iob* IV.388: *armiger ipse Iouis.*

<sup>102</sup> *Iob* II.110; VI.147; VI.556; VIII.252; VIII.304. Compare for example Ov. *Ars Am* 3.789; Luc. *BC* III.292 and Zarini (1997), 169.

<sup>103</sup> *Iob* II.398–403, on which see Chapter 5.

<sup>104</sup> Decret and Fantar (1998), 255–7; Camps (1999) is conspicuously cautious. Corippus is our only secure source for Gurzil: Elmayer (1982) detects a reference to Gurzil in a neo-Punic inscription from Lepcis Magna, but this has been convincingly refuted: compare Rebuffat (1990), 139; Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 223.

cult of Gurzil was connected to that of Ammon and indeed introduces the god in these terms in the catalogue of tribes in Book II:

Fierce Ierna was their leader and the priest of Gurzil. The *gentes* report that his parents were horned Ammon [*corniger Ammon*] and a grim heifer. Such is the madness in their clouded minds! Ah, this is the way the evil spirits deceive the wretched *gentes*!<sup>105</sup>

Elsewhere in the poem, he is characterized as ‘Ammonian Gurzil’ and often appears alongside the senior god.<sup>106</sup> Gurzil is physically represented in a range of ways throughout the poem. At the opening of battle in Book V, Ierna produces a living bull to represent the god’s spirit and releases it before the Moorish army:

A bull was sent out from the middle of the Moorish line by . . . magical craft; a bull whom Ierna, the priest and supreme guide of these tribes’ leaders, had fashioned to represent the spirit of Ammonian Gurzil, as a first omen for his people.<sup>107</sup>

Corippus is clear that this bull was not itself a god, but rather was crafted as a manifestation of Gurzil’s *numen*, by Ierna’s arcane skill (*cum . . . magica . . . arte*), but the precise ritual significance of this episode remains puzzling.<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, Gurzil is said to have been represented by a physical icon. In the exchange of threats before the battle, John Troglita proclaims his intention to destroy a ‘carved Gurzil’ made of wood.<sup>109</sup> As the fighting in Book V reaches its conclusion, Ierna’s flight is prevented by a bulky statue of the god which he is unable to fit on his horse.<sup>110</sup> In neither case are we told the form these icons took. The nature of the sacred animal in Book V, along with Corippus’ statement that Gurzil’s mother was a cow, may imply that Gurzil was a bull-god, but this need not have been the case.<sup>111</sup> John’s boasting before the same battle also includes an extended pun on the Moorish ‘ram’ and his intention to feast on this creature, which may indicate that Gurzil was connected to the ram

<sup>105</sup> *Iob*. II.109–12: *Ierna ferox his ductor erat Gurzilque sacerdos. | huic referunt gentes pater est quod corniger Ammon, | bucula torua parens: tanta est insania caecis | mentibus! ah, miseris fallunt sic numina gentes!*

<sup>106</sup> *Iob* V.25: *Ammonii . . . numina Gurzil*. Closely juxtaposed at *Iob* VI.116 and VIII.304.

<sup>107</sup> *Iob* V.22–6: *cum \*\*\* magica taurus dimittitur arte | Maurorum e medio, taurus, quem Ierna sacerdos | atque idem gentis rectorum maximus auctor | finxerat Ammonii signantem numina Gurzil, | omina prima suis*. The text is significantly corrupt at V.22.

<sup>108</sup> On the significance of *numina* in the *Iobannis*, see especially Andres (1994). <sup>109</sup> *Iob* II.405–6.

<sup>110</sup> *Iob* V.493–502.

<sup>111</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 302. Compare for example Benabou (1976), 277; Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 249–50 with n. 3; Mattingly (1995), 39 and 212, ‘bull-headed’.

cult of his father.<sup>112</sup> Equally, the final appearance of the god in the poem, a passing reference in which Gurzil is unable to prevent his worshipper Succur from being crushed by the horse ‘to which he had entrusted himself’, may indicate that the god was also associated with that animal, although possible scriptural allusions in this passage complicate the reading.<sup>113</sup> Horse-cults seem to have been rare in Libya in this period, but it is certainly possible that Gurzil took a variety of different forms at different times.

Corippus explicitly connects Ierna’s position as priest of Gurzil with his leadership of the Ilaguas or Laguatan, and it is likely that shared devotion to the god helped solidify the unity of this group or confederation during conflict.<sup>114</sup> In the battle narrative of Book V Ierna acts as a priest rather than a warrior, and even his death is presented as a consequence of this misplaced devotion.<sup>115</sup> Yet it is clear even from the scattered references in the *Iohannis* that secular and religious authority among the Ilaguas combined in different ways at different times. Ierna’s successor, Carcasan, is never presented as a priest: his elevation to command is marked by his visit to the oracle of Ammon, and he is much more closely associated with the senior god than he is with Gurzil.<sup>116</sup> Carcasan’s authority is emphatically military throughout the poem, and he undertakes no ritual actions. Here we might also recall that Antalas claimed leadership over the Laguatan (at least in Corippus’ telling), despite his likely origins in southern Byzacium, far from the homeland of that group. Like Carcasan, Antalas was emphatically a military leader within the *Iohannis*, and he was also associated with the oracle of Ammon, although this is a more puzzling tradition, as we shall see. Despite this, he may still have fostered his own connection with Gurzil. Antalas’ brother, killed at the orders of Solomon in 544 and a major cause for his break with the empire, rejoiced in the name Guarizila, so this religious connection may have been active for some time.<sup>117</sup> If Laguatan identity (and the leadership within that community) were bound up in the worship of Gurzil, this was evidently rather more fluid than the simply the holding of military and hieratic office simultaneously.

Gurzil may have been connected with the settlement at Ghirza in the Wadi Zemzem, which has been identified as his principal ritual centre.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> *Iob* VIII.610–16.

<sup>113</sup> *Iob* VIII.615–19 at 618: *quo sibi fisis erat*. Compare Ps.32:17 and the note of Zarini (2006), 56.

<sup>114</sup> See *Iob* II.109 and Chapter 5. <sup>115</sup> *Iob* V.506–21.

<sup>116</sup> Compare for example Carcasan’s evocation of Ammon at *Iob* VI.116–18 and 556–7.

<sup>117</sup> *Iob* IV.366; Riedmüller (1919), 42. He is alluded to (but not named) at *Iob* II.28, III.384 and Proc. BV II.21.17, 22.8.

<sup>118</sup> Brett and Fentress (1996), 66; Modéran (2003a), 283–5, and see especially Mattingly (1995), 206–7, and Mattingly (2011), 265–7, for the fullest discussion. Tommasi (2021), 65–6, is a useful recent summary.



Ghirza was a substantial pre-desert settlement which reached its peak in the fourth century but retained a significant status (albeit in much changed form) down to the mid-sixth century.<sup>119</sup> The settlement was distinguished by two substantial *gsur*, or fortified farms, as well as a number of very prominent mausolea and a small temple. The obvious similarity between the names Gurzil and Ghirza is the clearest evidence for the connection between the god and this settlement, and a passing reference to *Gurza* in the eleventh-century history of El Bekri suggests that the toponym could have been ancient, (or at least is not modern).<sup>120</sup> It should be emphasized, however, that this connection is not absolutely secure: the toponym may well derive from the Libyan root GZA ('gorge'), rather than the god's name.<sup>121</sup> Both may also be connected to the modern Berber term *gir* ('watercourse') or the prefix *ger-* (which commonly appears in the names of mountains).<sup>122</sup>

Similar doubts relate to the cultic activities on the site, which bear some similarities to the cult Corippus describes, but differ in important ways. The rich sculptural decoration from the settlement, for example, includes prominent depictions of bulls, and a relief on the largest tomb clearly depicts a bull sacrifice.<sup>123</sup> A third-century Latin inscription found nearby describes the sacrifice of fifty-one bulls as part of a ceremony called a *parentalia*, which has been interpreted as a form of ancestor veneration.<sup>124</sup> While these may reflect the cult of Gurzil – the offspring of Ammon and a young cow, as Corippus tells us – this ritual is not attested in the *Iohannis*. The sacrifices of cattle described in Book VIII of the *Iohannis* are partly made in honour of Gurzil, but are more closely associated with one Mastiman, who seems to have been the presiding deity.<sup>125</sup> Nor does Corippus refer to any specific cult site of Gurzil within his epic: both of the oracle episodes are associated explicitly with Ammon rather than his offspring. Here it is important to remember that the richest archaeological evidence from Ghirza dates to around two centuries before the composition of the *Iohannis*, and the sixth-century material suggests a much more restricted form of worship from the

<sup>119</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984). On the significance of the site, see especially Mattingly (1995), 197–207; Mattingly (1999); Mattingly (2003) reprinted and expanded in Mattingly (2011), 246–68. On the wider archaeological context, see especially the work of the UNESCO Libyan Valleys survey discussed in Barker (1996) and Mattingly and Barker (1996).

<sup>120</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 36. <sup>121</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 36.

<sup>122</sup> See Tissot (1888), 91, Desanges (1980), 138 and Brogan and Smith (1984), 36; discussing the Mauretanian river *Ger* in Pliny *HN* V.15 and the *Agger* of Vitruvius VIII.2.6.

<sup>123</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 123 and Pl 52c; Nikolaus (2017), 83–6.

<sup>124</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 182, 262. The inscription also refers to the sacrifice of thirty-eight goats.

<sup>125</sup> *Ioh* VIII.300–7.



profligate sacrifices of the later Roman period.<sup>126</sup> If Ghirza did remain a cult site dedicated to Gurzil throughout this period, it is evidence above all for the changing nature of that cult.

A mid-third-century dedicatory inscription from Gholaiia (Bu Njem) provides a second possible parallel. Gholaiia was the site of a forward frontier post of the third legion between 201 and circa 260, and is best known for the preservation of a substantial corpus of ostraca produced by its garrison.<sup>127</sup> Several small temples were dedicated by officers of the garrison the vicinity of the legionary camp, including one to Jupiter Ammon, a second to the otherwise unknown Vanammon, a god whose name evidently suggests a connection of some sort to Ammon.<sup>128</sup> After discussion with Gabriel Camps, Rene Rebuffat proposed that the prefix Van- may be a Berber marker of affiliation, meaning something like 'son of', and hence concluded that the temple of Vanammon had been erected to honour Gurzil, the son of Ammon in Corippus' account.<sup>129</sup> Appealing as this suggestion is, however, it is far from secure. Even if we accept that the temple did indeed honour a son of Ammon, Gurzil would still not be the most promising candidate. Alexander of Macedon was the most famous son of Ammon in the classical world by some distance, but even he was not the only heir. In the fourth book of *Aeneid*, Virgil introduces the Libyan King Iarbas, who was also a son of Hammon, and others doubtless also claimed this honour.<sup>130</sup> The simplest explanation is that the temple at Bu Njem was not built for Alexander, Iarbas or Gurzil, but rather for Vanammon, an otherwise unknown sapling from this tangled family tree.

### *Mastiman and Sinifere*

Corippus names two other gods in the Moorish pantheon, but neither is described in detail. In the opening exchange in the battle of Book V, Mastiman and Sinifere appear alongside Gurzil among the gods invoked by the Moorish warriors:

First invoking Sinifer, the Maurusian troops called upon fierce Mastiman: 'Mastiman!', the echo responded. Then they shouted the name of Gurzil: 'Gurzil' the hollow rocks replied.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 250–5.

<sup>127</sup> Speidel (1988); Marichal (1992); Adams (1994). On the ancient toponym, see Desanges (1990), 259.

<sup>128</sup> Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 155–6. Compare Wagner (1987), 334–5, on the cult of Parammon at Siwa.

<sup>129</sup> Rebuffat (1990), 140–1. <sup>130</sup> Virg. *Aen* IV.196–8 and compare *Sil Ital*, *Pun*. II.58–64.

<sup>131</sup> *Ioh* V.37–9: *hinc Sinifere uocans acies Maurusia clamat | Mastimanque ferum: Mastiman assonat echo. inde ferunt Gurzil: Gurzil caua saxa resultant.*

In Book VIII, the same gods return with a syncretistic gloss, which identifies them with more familiar Latin figures:

Some sacrificed to Gurzil, others to you, horned Ammon; some worshipped Sinifere, whom the Mazax regards as the spirit of Mars and a powerful god of war, others Mastiman. For it is by this name that the Moorish *gentes* designated Taenarian Jove.<sup>132</sup>

These are the only references to Sinifere and Mastiman within the *Iohannis*. The names themselves are plausible enough, and it reasonable to assume that Corippus drew upon authentic information.<sup>133</sup> The simple fact that the two gods appear together in both passages suggests that they were also coupled together in Corippus' source (whatever that might have been) and that he invoked them when he wished to express the arcane otherness of Moorish paganism, or simply to add variety to his account.

Corippus' syncretism is intriguing and fits well with the two contexts in which the gods appear. The identification of Mastiman with Taenarian Jove (*Taenarium . . . Iouem*) is an unusual formulation, but it is clearly intended to evoke Jupiter in his infernal form akin to Pluto or Liber Pater.<sup>134</sup> This corresponds closely to the nocturnal rituals which the poet goes on to describe, at which Mastiman was focal.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the connection between Sinifere and Mars seems appropriate for a god twice invoked in the build-up to battle. It is easy to imagine how reports of these chants might have reached Corippus from Byzantine soldiers who heard them from the other side of the battlefield. Corippus' concern to identify the Moorish gods with their Roman equivalents may betray a general ignorance of these divinities among the poet's audience, but the opposite could also be true. Corippus may have been making sense of a strange pagan world for the Christians of Carthage or rehearsing familiar *topoi* about the Moorish gods which an African audience would have known well.<sup>136</sup>

For once, the extant epigraphic evidence provides clear support for Corippus' testimony. Among the religious buildings dedicated by the officers at Gholaia in the third century was a small apsidal temple 7.7 metres in length which an inscription of 235 dedicated to 'Mars

<sup>132</sup> *Iob* VIII.304–8: *hi mactant Gurzil, alii tibi corniger Ammon; | hi Sinifere colunt, quem Mazax numina Martis | accipit atque deum belli putat esse potentem, | Mastiman alii. Maurorum hoc nomine gentes | Taenarium dixerunt Iouem.*

<sup>133</sup> On these names, see especially Tommasi (2021), 64–5.

<sup>134</sup> See Bates (1914), 185 and Brouquier-Reddé (1992). Riedlberger (2010), 305–6, notes the likely influence of Luc. *BC* VI.648.

<sup>135</sup> *Iob* VIII.300–17.

<sup>136</sup> Riedlberger (2010), 305, citing Mantke (1991). I have been unable to access this work.

Canapphar'.<sup>137</sup> The similarity between the names Canapphar (who is not otherwise known) and Sinifere, along with the identification of both with Mars, strongly implies that these were the same figure and that the god identified by Corippus had been worshipped in similar form some three centuries earlier.<sup>138</sup> It is noteworthy that the patron of the temple, the legate Titus Flavius Apronianus, did not bear an obviously Libyan name and erected the temple in the name of his emperor and his unit.<sup>139</sup> The temples at Gholaia lay outside the military camp and may have been intended for local use as well as military worship, but the structures clearly lay within the ambit of the army and most seem to have been defaced or abandoned shortly after the departure of the vexillation in around 260.<sup>140</sup> Several similar inscriptions in Numidia and Mauretania from around the same time reveal Roman officers making dedications to Moorish gods (*Dii Mauri*), sometimes alongside members of the traditional pantheon, but this formulation does not seem to have been used in Tripolitania.<sup>141</sup>

Corippus has little to say on the religious rituals associated with either of these gods. The short passage in Book VIII implies that Gurzil, Ammon, Sinifere and Mastiman were all honoured with nocturnal sacrifices and shouted appeals to the gods.<sup>142</sup> Most of the victims seem to have been cattle, but the episode climaxes with an account of human sacrifice:

For it is by this name [Mastiman] that the Moorish *gentes* designated Taenarian Jove, and sacrificed a human victim to him as a curse amid much bloodshed.<sup>143</sup>

Corippus states that this was followed by haruspicy – the examination of entrails by a priest in order to divine the future:

Then, in their sacrilegious way, they ripped out the entrails of their animals and sought their fates. But God had stopped this and every spirit was deaf to their incantations: their priest brought back responses to none of them.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Rebuffat (1990), 153; Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 156.   <sup>138</sup> Rebuffat (1990), 140.

<sup>139</sup> Rebuffat (1990), 142–3.   <sup>140</sup> Rebuffat (1990), 147–8.

<sup>141</sup> *CIL* VIII. 9195; 8435; 21486. Fentress (1978) is an excellent overview, and compare Bénabou (1976), 309–30, and Camps (1954) and Camps (1990). See Brouquier-Reddé (1992), 250, on the absence of the formula in Tripolitania.

<sup>142</sup> *Iob* VIII.300–17.

<sup>143</sup> *Iob* VIII.307–9: *Maurorum hoc nomine gentes | Taenarium dixere Iouem, cui sanguine multo | humani generis mactatur uictima pesti*. Riedlberger (2010), 303 translates this as 'Diesem Verderben der Menschheit wurde ein Opfertier unter großem Blutvergießen geschlachtet' ('a victim was slaughtered with great bloodshed, to the ruin of mankind') with comments at 306–7. For a refutation, see Gärtner (2013), 1244.

<sup>144</sup> *Iob*. VIII.314–17: *tunc more profano | diripiunt pecudum fibras et fata requirunt. | presserat ista deus, surdumque ad carmina numen | omne fuit: nulli retulit responsa sacerdos*.

Intriguing as this imagery is, it can hardly be read as a reliable account of actual religious practices, not least because Corippus is unlikely to have drawn upon a direct witness to these events.<sup>145</sup> The noisy, nocturnal sacrifices and failed haruspices described here also contrast pointedly with the calm Christian worship the next morning, which is recounted in the following lines. Corippus clearly presented the Moorish ritual with this opposition in mind. While he does not directly follow a poetic model in this episode (as he does elsewhere), it is evidently a fictionalized account and can probably tell us little about Moorish religion as actually practised at this time.

### *Moorish Prophecies*

The fullest passages relating to Moorish religious practices within the *Iohannis* are the long descriptions of prophetic rituals in Book III and Book VI.<sup>146</sup> These are among the most vivid sections of the poem, and the most challenging to read with confidence as reliable historical sources. At the start of Liberatus' long digression in Book III is an account of the prophecies relating to the infant Antalas, who had been brought to an oracle by his father, Guenfan. Liberatus relates the sacrifices which preceded the prophecy, and the physical sufferings of the oracle:

His father himself went to the false temple of Ammon. Inquiring into the terrible fate of his criminal son, he sacrificed horrid offerings to Jove in sacrilegious fashion. Then, going to the sad altars of Apollo, he searched for the tripods and laurel of Phoebus. Blood of the most gruesome kind was poured upon the awful altars, as the priestess, her head in sacred bindings, slaughtered animals of every kind and provoked the fates. First she examined the innards that she had torn out, hidden in long coils; then she placed the rough entrails in the eternal flames.<sup>147</sup>

The oracle then turns the sacrificial knife on herself and is lost in a frenzied possession before the prophecy begins. She predicts Antalas' mixed fortunes in life, his role in the downfall of the Vandal kingdom and his brief

<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, commentators have frequently assumed that the episode contains a kernel of truth. See for example Riedlberger (2010), 310.

<sup>146</sup> On the wider narrative function of these prophecies, see especially Chapter 3.

<sup>147</sup> *Iob* III.81–90: *namque Ammonis ipse | templa petit simulata pater. tunc prolis iniquae | fata tremenda rogans mactat de more profano | horrida sacra Ioui, tristes et Apollinis aras | inde petens Phoebi tripodas lauresque requirit. | funditur horrendis sanguis maetissimus aris, | omnigenumque pecus mactat uittata sacerdos, | fata mouens: raptis primum quaesiuit in extis | inspiciens (series patuit longissima) fibras, | diraque perpetuis imponit uiscera flammis.*

rise to prominence before eventually being forced to bear the yoke of the Byzantine power (an aspect of the prophecy which Guenfan and his followers chose not to heed).<sup>148</sup>

The episode is echoed in Book VI at the start of the second phase of the campaign, and indeed of Corippus' epic. Here, it is Carcasan who appeals to the Libyan oracle, and the episode is narrated (and glossed) in the poet's own voice:

When he saw that the anger which consumed his people had increased and their fury for the insane war was bubbling up, he went to the edges of Marmaridan territory, where Horned Ammon lives, and sought a reply from cruel Jove. But that Jupiter whom you seek is a liar, and always delights in tricking wretched minds, you fool: hideous, he takes joy in blood and wishes to destroy all the *gentes*. Once the wild bull was struck in the forehead with an axe and killed, the most wretched priestess seized her raucous tambourine in her hands and whirled around the altar in a frenzy of noise.<sup>149</sup>

Again, the initial stages of the ritual are followed by an account of the possession, of the hair of the priestess whirling around, her eyes flashing and her physical spasms. In this case, the prophecy is remarkably lucid and prepares the audience for the action ahead. Her prophecy anticipates the last three books of the *Iohannis*. The specific prediction that the Moors will 'hold the fields of Byzacium' and Carcasan will be taken in a triumph through Carthage motivates the Moors in their conflict with the empire. As we have seen, its correct interpretation – as a prophecy of Moorish death and defeat – underpins the wider narrative structure of the *Iohannis*.<sup>150</sup>

The literary impulses which shaped each of these passages have long been recognized by scholars, and would certainly have been apparent to Corippus' immediate audience.<sup>151</sup> For those familiar with scripture, the echo in each episode of Saul's visitation to the Witch of Endor in 1 Kings 28 would have been particularly clear.<sup>152</sup> Oracular visitations had also featured very prominently in classical epic, of course, perhaps most obviously in Aeneas' visit to the Sibyl and subsequent *katabasis* in *Aeneid* VI, and

<sup>148</sup> *Iob* III.107–40.

<sup>149</sup> *Iob* VI.145–165: *ille ut conceptum populis auxisse furorem | uidit et insani rabiem succrescere Martis, | Marmaridum fines, habitat quo corniger Ammon, | inde petit, durique Iouis responsa poposcit. | semper amat miseris deceptor fallere mentes | Iuppiter hic quem, uane, rogas: in sanguine gaudet | borridus et cunctas quaerit disperdere gentes. | asper in aduersa percussus fronte bipenni | taurus ut occubuit, manibus tristissima uates | tympana rauca rapit saltusque altaria circum | cum strepitu lymphata rotat.*

<sup>150</sup> This point is explored fully in Chapter 3. <sup>151</sup> Zarini (1996) provides a clear overview.

<sup>152</sup> 1 Kings 28:7–25. Compare Zarini (1996), 129–30, and Tommasi Moerschini (2002c), 334–5. The circumstances fit more closely with Carcasan's appeal in Book VI, but parallels are clear in each case.

Corippus readily drew upon this tradition.<sup>153</sup> Many of the details of the two episodes come from either Virgil or his successors: the Apollonian tripods of the Guenfan passage seem to have been lifted from Lucan, for example, and the account of the initial sacrifice recalls different parts of the *Aeneid*.<sup>154</sup> The physical contortions of the priestesses are also anticipated in Lucan's *Civil War*, both in his account of the Oracle of Delphi in Book V and in his memorable description of the witch Erichtho, who foretells the endless civil war through a reanimated zombie in Book VI.<sup>155</sup> Even the narrative circumstances of these episodes have literary antecedents: Antalas' journey to the Libyan oracle in his infancy bears direct comparison to the prophecies made about the young Hannibal Barca in the first book of Silius Italicus' *Punica*, and similar borrowings have been identified from the works of Statius and Valerius Flaccus.<sup>156</sup> The underlying conceit of the prophecies – that the ostensible promise of success actually disguised inevitable failure – was also a commonplace in classical epic, but was particularly closely anticipated in Claudian's poems *Against Rufinus*, and *The Gothic War*, and it is likely that Corippus took his inspiration from one or both of these.<sup>157</sup> Prophetic sequences were among the standard fittings of a classical epic, and were also important moments for intertextual reflection: in the Sibylline prophecy of *Aeneid* VI, for example, an explicit comparison is made between the war-torn landscape of the *Iliad* and the battlefields Aeneas was to face in the latter part of that poem.<sup>158</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that Corippus' audience expected something similar when his account turned to the arcane predictions of the desert oracles.

The literary importance of these passages to the structure of the *Iohannis*, combined with the poetic spolia from which they were constructed, greatly complicate any attempt to use them as meaningful sources for Moorish religion as it was actually practised in the sixth century.<sup>159</sup> For obvious

<sup>153</sup> Compare Virg. *Aen* VI.77–155. On the literary influences behind the passage, see especially Zarini (1996) (who notes that the Sibylline passage in *Aeneid* VI has less of a direct influence on Corippus here than other epic exemplars) and Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 127–66.

<sup>154</sup> Zarini (1996), 123–32, provides a helpful introduction, and compare also Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 127–9 with the discussion of specific borrowings at 129–71.

<sup>155</sup> Luc *BC* V.102–40, VI.667–820. Zarini (1996), 127, and Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), 127–9, discuss further Lucanian echoes.

<sup>156</sup> Sil Ital. *Pun* I.70–139. Note that Hannibal seems to have been commonly connected with Zeus-Ammon in antiquity. Compare Diod. Sic. 25.14; Plin. *HNV*.148; Amm Marc. 22.9.3. On other epic echoes, see Tommasi Moreschini (2001a), *passim*.

<sup>157</sup> Claud. *In Ruf.* II.331–3; *BellGet.* 544–9. Schindler (2009), 251–2. <sup>158</sup> Virg. *Aen* VI.83–97.

<sup>159</sup> Thus Parke (1967), 232–3: 'It would be impossible to prove that Corippus should be taken as serious evidence that the oracle was consulted. His narrative may be purely imaginary and may simply be inserted to provide the appropriate kind of romantic episode.' And 250: '[I]t is impossible to believe that the Egyptian ritual of Ammon had really been transformed into this orgy.'

reasons, Corippus cannot have drawn upon first-hand accounts of either of these episodes, and quite clearly filled in the gaps with material from his literary influences, but there is reason to think that both passages relate to genuine religious practices of the time. Procopius twice describes how Moorish leaders consulted female oracles for guidance in their dealings with Byzantine power, and the connection between Moorish rebellion and arcane religious worship was evidently clear to an audience in Carthage.<sup>160</sup> It also seems likely that oracles continued to function in the oases of the Libyan desert and remained prominent well into late antiquity. At the very least, the imperial authorities went to some effort to close down these centres in the period after 548. The oracle of Ammon at Siwa was certainly the best known of these and seems to have retained its importance, even after a Christian presence was established there in the fourth century.<sup>161</sup> Temples to Ammon or Jupiter-Ammon also sprang up along the caravan routes of the pre-desert and the Sahara, and several of these may also have become oracle centres in their own right.<sup>162</sup> There is some evidence that the oracle to Ammon at Augila was active in the sixth century, and the settlement at Ghirza in the Wadi Zemzem clearly had a continued religious status down to the middle of the sixth century, even if this was not quite as spectacular as it had once been.<sup>163</sup> The uneven nature of archaeology in this region and the very sparse textual and epigraphic evidence make it difficult to map this changing religious landscape with any confidence, but the continued relevance of powerful religious centres in the desert seems likely, and this may have been especially apparent at moments of political crisis. Corippus' testimony is valuable here, irrespective of its classicizing detail: if his account is evidence for continued Moorish appeals to the oracle of Ammon, this casts significant

<sup>160</sup> Proc. *BV* II.8.12–15 (at the time of Belisarius' landing); II.12.28 (after defeat by Solomon). Other female figures: Grébénart (1994) discusses the 'Tin Hinan' tomb in southern Algeria, which may be that of a woman who was a prominent religious figure within a Saharan oasis community from around this time. And compare the earliest Arabic accounts of the conquest to the mysterious Kahena ('Priestess') who was a figurehead for resistance to Islam in the Aures.

<sup>161</sup> Athanasius *Apol. ad Const.*, 32, alludes to the exile of churchmen to the oasis in the fourth century. Epiphanius *Adv Haer.* II.2.68 (Against Melitius) implies that Alexandria had episcopal authority over the oasis from the early fourth century, and Eusebius *Theoph.* III.13 that the oracle was silent at that time. On all of these, compare Wagner (1987), 369–70, and Kuhlmann (1998). A fourth-century Greek epigram *Anth Pal* VII.687 laments the silence of the 'fraudulent' oracle. *Pace* Zarini (1996), 119, this need not imply that the oracle centre was closed. For the comparable survival of the Isis Temple at Philae as a religious centre, even long after the installation of a Christian bishop, see Dijkstra (2008).

<sup>162</sup> Brouquiere-Reddé (1992). Scattered evidence exists for possible cult sites across the pre-desert, including third- or fourth-century reliefs depicting a bull sacrifices from Wadi Zemzem (Ghirza) and Wadi Al-Binaya. Compare Nikolaus (2016) and Nikolaus (2017), 86–8.

<sup>163</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984); Brouquiere-Reddé (1992), 142–5.

light upon the society of the extended frontier zone. Even if these episodes were completely fabricated by the poet, they may still reveal how this religious landscape was perceived in imperial Carthage and offer some context for a programme of evangelism into the pre-desert after 548.<sup>164</sup>

Carcasan's visit to the oracle in late 546 or early 547 seems the more historically plausible of the two episodes Corippus described. As Yves Modéran has noted, Carcasan's elevation to the leadership of a broad confederation in Syrtica makes an appeal to religious authority seem comprehensible, particularly during a time of extended conflict with the empire.<sup>165</sup> The prophecy that he received – or at least the version of it that was circulated to his followers, which became known to the Romans through the testimony of the captive Varinnus – also makes sense in this context: this was a prediction of a victory in a coming war, which could have functioned as a rallying cry during a period of imperial aggression. The fact that Carcasan led a group (or groups) from Syrtica also made an appeal to the desert oracle comprehensible, regardless of whether this was made in Siwa, Augila or a site now unknown to us.<sup>166</sup>

The account of Guenfan's earlier appeal is altogether more fantastic, and it must be suspected that the poet fashioned this story retrospectively in order to lend Antalas a greater status as the principal antagonist of his poem. According to the narrative logic of Liberatus' digression, this journey would have taken place in Antalas' infancy – that is, about 500 CE, when Guenfan was the leader of a *humilis gens* in southern Byzacium, far from the desert cult centres of Ammon.<sup>167</sup> The prophecy reported in the *Iohannis* reflects the political balance of this part of Africa as it appeared from the later 540s, and not at the turn of the century. Here, the content of the prophecy clearly follows narrative logic of the epic, and this necessarily throws its historical value into doubt. As Modéran has noted, Corippus' intention here may simply have been to develop further the connection between a Moorish leader from southern Byzacena and the exotic pagan barbarism of the distant desert.<sup>168</sup> That said, the story should still not be dismissed completely. Although we must doubt whether Guenfan ever made such a journey, it is certainly possible that Antalas himself was the originator of these stories, rather than Corippus even if the poet elaborated upon them. A personal connection with a Libyan oracle would have been

<sup>164</sup> This is discussed more fully at 250–256 below.

<sup>165</sup> Zarini (1996), 118; Modéran (2003a), 237–45.

<sup>166</sup> Wagner (1987), 331, n. 3., assumes that the episode took place at Siwa. Compare Modéran (2003a), 237–41.

<sup>167</sup> *Iob* III.153. <sup>168</sup> Modéran (2003a), 240.



useful in the rapidly changing political environment of the 540s, as new alliances with different groups became viable, and particularly if Antalas' claims to leadership within the Laguatan were more than a conceit of our poet's. Here again we should recall that Antalas' ill-fated brother bore the name Guarizila, which may indicate a connection to Gurzil, another god who seems to have been more closely associated with the Syrtic region than the steppes of southern Byzacium.<sup>169</sup>

### **Moorish Religion beyond the *Iohannis***

Corippus' impressionistic account of Moorish religious practices must be situated firmly in the context of the mid-sixth century. As we saw in Chapter 4, this was a period during which the social behaviours – and identities – of North African groups were changing considerably, but was also a moment when the empire became increasingly interested in the religious practices of the wider frontier zone. If we accept that the leaders of the Laguatan might act as priests of Gurzil as well as military commanders – as Corippus implies – we cannot assume that this connection was any older than the 'Laguatan' identity itself, which was almost certainly a creation of the sixth century. The very emergence of such novel forms of political and social affiliation may itself have fostered new cultic activity. Similarly, while it is certainly possible that the elites of Ghirza in the third and fourth centuries worshipped Gurzil specifically, and that the site retained its sacred importance into the Byzantine period, the manifestations of this practice had clearly changed dramatically in the intervening years. The spectacular sacrifices and feasts which took place in the later Roman period have no direct parallel in the later archaeology from that site, and nothing like them is described in Corippus' *Iohannis*. By the sixth century, the tombs on the site were no longer the focus of ritual activity, and the function of the most prominent temple also seems to have changed. That structure was substantially enlarged in its last phase of use and multiple new altars were erected, many of which were inscribed with Libyan script and a new repertoire of decorative motifs.<sup>170</sup> Even if the gods who were honoured at Ghirza remained the same, then (and we cannot know this for sure), the nature of their worship had clearly changed dramatically during this period of upheaval.

<sup>169</sup> *Ioh* IV.366; Riedmüller (1919), 42.

<sup>170</sup> Brogan (1975); Brogan and Smith (1984), 82–8, 250–1.

The detail of the *Iohannis* testifies to the fascination that the inhabitants of Carthage felt towards Moorish religion, but may also betray a significant shift in these attitudes. In the earliest years of the occupation, the imperial authorities seem to have adopted a pragmatic view of the religious practices of their neighbours on the frontier. Procopius happily included stories of the Tripolitanian leader Cabaon who came into conflict with the Vandal King Thrasamund at the turn of the sixth century.<sup>171</sup> Although Cabaon was pagan, his deference to the power of the Christian God surpassed that of the heretical Thrasamund and earned him victory: here, as elsewhere in the *Wars*, the Moors could stand as moral *exempla* without too much concern for their precise religious beliefs.<sup>172</sup> A similar pragmatism was evident on the frontiers, where Byzantine commanders followed late Roman practice in requiring allies to take oaths on their local divinities rather than imposing the Christian God upon them.<sup>173</sup> When Sergius oversaw the calamitous meeting in 543, for example, it was only the Christians who swore on the Gospels; others took their oaths in their own fashion.<sup>174</sup> We may see traces of a similar practice in a mysterious lintel found in a school building at Tozeur (anc. Tusuros) to the north of the Chott El-Djerid.<sup>175</sup> This stone bears the inscription [*Arma*] *repone domi: nemo nunc vota reu[o]luat* [Take home your arms, may no one now make vows for war] and is decorated with a cross, two rosettes, a pair of doves and a figure carrying a spear in one hand.<sup>176</sup> To judge from its lettering, the lintel is probably early Byzantine, but cannot be dated securely.<sup>177</sup> As Denys Pringle has suggested, it is probably best viewed as testimony to the ongoing diplomatic activities in this part of the frontier, and may well date to the 540s or 550s. The sentiment of the lintel is entirely Christian, but its imagery may also have resonated in other religious contexts.<sup>178</sup> Given this, it is conspicuous that Corippus makes no reference to the Christianity of Cusina, Ifisdaia or the other Moorish allies in John's army: for purely pragmatic reasons, the disparate religious sympathies of supporters could often be tolerated by the state and the church, as long as they were fighting on the right side.

<sup>171</sup> Proc. *BVL* 8.5–29.

<sup>172</sup> Compare Evagrius *HE* IV.15, who makes exactly this point in glossing his paraphrase of Procopius.

<sup>173</sup> In Aug *Ep.* 46.1, the bishop advises a local landowner, Publicola, to accept pledges on local gods made by the Arzuges. Compare Modéran (2003a) 364–74, 457–9; Troussel (2011); Uhalde (2011).

<sup>174</sup> Proc. *SH* V.28; *BV* II.21.21–2 implies that the Moors had followed their own practices. On this meeting and its tragic outcome, see Chapter 2.

<sup>175</sup> Monceaux (1908), 234–6;

<sup>176</sup> Translated in Pringle (1981), 100. Compare also Modéran (2003a), 343–4.

<sup>177</sup> Monceaux (1908), 235–6. <sup>178</sup> Pringle (1981), 100–1.

There is good reason to think that imperial religious policy towards the Moors changed after the victory of 548, and that there was an attempt to consolidate John's victory with a programme of active evangelism across the wider frontier zone. Indeed this may have been applied still more widely across the imperial world.<sup>179</sup> The evidence is fragmentary but suggestive, and rests largely on Procopius' *Buildings*, an extended celebration of Justinian's building activity across the empire probably written in the second half of the 550s.<sup>180</sup> In the final book of that work, Procopius discusses Africa and looks first at the region from Cyrenaica to Tripolitania:

And there are two cities which are known by the same name, each of them being called Augila. These are distant from Boreum about four days' journey for an unencumbered traveller, and to the south of it; and they are both ancient cities whose inhabitants have preserved the practices of antiquity, for they all were suffering from the disease of polytheism even up to my day. There from ancient times there have been shrines dedicated to Ammon and to Alexander the Macedonian. The natives actually used to make sacrifices to them even up to the reign of Justinian.<sup>181</sup>

Procopius goes on to describe the construction of a church to Theotokos, the Mother of God, in Augila, one of several to be erected under the emperor in Africa:

Indeed he by no means neglected to take thought for their material interests in an exceptional way, and also he has taught them the doctrine of the true faith, making the whole population Christians and bringing about a transformation of their polluted ancestral customs. Moreover he built for them a Church of the Mother of God to be a guardian of the safety of the cities and of the true faith. So much, then, for this.<sup>182</sup>

Procopius seems to be referring to the oasis of Augila (mod. Awjila), which is approximately four days' journey from the coast and consists of two or three principal nucleated settlements.<sup>183</sup> Alternatively, he may inadvertently have conflated Augila and Siwa, ten days' journey further west.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Engelhardt (1974) is a systematic treatment of Justinianic evangelism, with a discussion of the Libyan programme (primarily derived from Procopius), at 25–7. Compare Greatrex (2014b) for a more recent treatment of similar actions elsewhere.

<sup>180</sup> See Greatrex (2022), 66–9, on the likely date of composition (and the scholarly debates surrounding this).

<sup>181</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.2.14–17, tr. Dewing (1940), 369 (modified).

<sup>182</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.2.19–20, tr. Dewing (1940), 369. On the particular importance of churches dedicated to Mary in Justinian's programme, see Vallejo Girves (1995), 257–60; Conant (2016), 204–7.

<sup>183</sup> See Reynolds (2000), 173–4, and compare Roques (2007), 293–4. Mattingly et al. (2020), 127–8, outline the archaeology of Augila (which has been minimal).

<sup>184</sup> Roques (1994), 263. Parke (1967), 233, and Wagner (1987), 333, n. 4 and 349, assume that Procopius conflated Augila and Siwa. Compare Kuhlmann (1998), 174: 'Procopius got his geography all mixed

The references to Ammon and the Alexander cult certainly fit with the better known oracle centre there, and there is no archaeological evidence to confirm an Ammon temple (or later Christian church) at Augila. Procopius may genuinely have confused the two oasis centres, but his immediate audience may not have noticed. The point he was making was that Justinian had taken Christianity deep into the heart of the desert and had overcome the old gods there. The precise location of this victory was less important than its global resonance.

John's victory in 548 provides the most plausible context for this activity, and this may have been part of a wider strategy across the province.<sup>185</sup> Procopius is explicit that Justinian's religious and military building were complementary in this case: he states that the conversion of Augila was accompanied by a consolidation of the military presence on the Syrtic coast at Boreum along with the conversion of the Jewish community there.<sup>186</sup> The activity in the interior may also be connected to the fortifications that Procopius states were constructed at Paraetionium (Mersa Matruh) at the Mediterranean end of the road to Siwa.<sup>187</sup> The *Buildings* refers to a range of defensive structures across the region, including fortified monasteries and churches, and while this is much less visible on the ground than the programme in the western African provinces, the few glimpses we do have are revealing.<sup>188</sup> This is particularly evident in the reinforcement of military buildings inland, particularly the impressive complex at Heneia, which overlooks some of the best wells on the caravan route to Augila.<sup>189</sup> All of this would have been impossible during the military upheaval between 543 and 548, and there is little evidence that the region was a strategic priority for the empire before that date. In the aftermath of a major victory, however, such building programmes would have an obvious ideological value. This would be particularly true if the Moorish rebellion was closely associated with the oracle centres themselves, and Corippus' *Iohannis* indicates that this was the case.

The picture is somewhat clearer at Ghirza, although again dating is far from certain. Religious activity at that site seems to have ended around the middle of the sixth century with the destruction by fire of the principal temple that

up, placing a temple of Ammon and of Alexander the Great at Augila Oasis instead of in Siwa and Bahariya respectively.'

<sup>185</sup> Modéran (2003a), 646–8; compare Roques (2007), 299–300.

<sup>186</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.21–3. On this, see especially Goodchild (1951–76b); Goodchild (1966), 233–4; Reynolds (2000), 174–5.

<sup>187</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.2.2. There are no traces of this fortification extant, although ruins of a Byzantine bathhouse were excavated there. Goodchild (1966), 238.

<sup>188</sup> Goodchild (1966), 231–43; Reynolds (2000), 173–6. <sup>189</sup> Goodchild (1951–76c).

was then in use.<sup>190</sup> Two of the late altars from that building were originally inscribed with Libyan script, but were over-carved with Christian crosses, apparently marking the presence of that faith in the Wadi settlement.<sup>191</sup> The same altars also bear simple images of human figures with their arms raised, which may have had a Christian resonance (and one with intriguing parallels to the descriptions of Christian prayer in the *Iohannis*), but variations on the form are known from across the region and the motif likely predated Justinian's evangelism of the region.<sup>192</sup> This evidence certainly attests to a Christian presence in the Wadi, but whether this was directly connected to the abandonment of the temple, or to Justinianic policy, remains uncertain. There are traces of Christian activity in the northern part of the Gebel from the fourth century, and fragments of lamps with Christian imagery dating from the fifth century have been found at Ghirza: these remind us that different ritual practices need not always have been in direct conflict, and that these crosses need not have been inscribed only at the moment of the temple's destruction.<sup>193</sup> Equally, although Justinian's muscular evangelism may explain the abandonment of the site in around 550, it is also possible that the break in settlement came about as a result of Laguatan attacks in the preceding months.<sup>194</sup> It is often assumed that Ghirza was a focal cult site for the rebellious Laguatan (and the imperial authorities may have shared this assumption), but there is no direct evidence for this, and religious loyalties may have been substantially more complex on the ground.<sup>195</sup>

The picture from other oases across Syrtica and the northern Sahara is rather less clear, although recent work has begun to address the importance of these settlements in the changing politics of the region.<sup>196</sup> There are certainly indications that the imperial authorities were acutely aware of this world: elsewhere in his *Buildings*, Procopius goes on to recount Justinian's conversion of the inhabitants of Cidamus (Ghadames), who had always been at peace with the empire and voluntarily adopted the faith.<sup>197</sup> These details imply that other groups had been in revolt and that Christianity was

<sup>190</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 85, 232.   <sup>191</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 250–1 and Pl.139a, b.

<sup>192</sup> Brogan and Smith (1984), 251. There they note the discovery of similar figures on the tops of columns and suggest that they may have been carved before their erection. Nikolaus (2017), 88, notes parallels from Wadi Merdum and Wadi Migdal in the pre-desert and from Tatahouine in the Gefara.

<sup>193</sup> Ward-Perkins and Goodchild (1953) survey the archaeological evidence for Christianity across the region, and compare Brogan (1975), 268; Sjöström (1993), 90–1; Mattingly (1995), 209–13; Nikolaus (2017), 217–18; Leone (2019), 267–71; Sheldrick (2022), 160.

<sup>194</sup> As noted by Modéran (2003a), 291–2, but compare 647.   <sup>195</sup> Mattingly (1995), 212–13.

<sup>196</sup> See especially the collected papers in Sterry and Mattingly (2020), and the important response of Scheele (2020).

<sup>197</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.3.10–11.

forcibly imposed upon them. Again, a context after 548 seems plausible. Procopius refers to the conversion of Moorish pagans among the Gadabitani, in the vicinity of Lepcis Magna.<sup>198</sup> Some tantalizing chronicle references from early in the reign of Justin II may also be understood in this context, although it is possible that this was part of a separate initiative. John of Biclar refers to an embassy from the Garamantes in 569, which requested both a political alliance with Rome and conversion to Christianity, and to the conversion of a group called the Maccuritae at about the same time. He records that the envoys of the Maccuritae returned four years later with gifts of elephant tusks and a giraffe.<sup>199</sup> These references tell us much less than we should like: the Maccuritae have been placed by modern scholars in the far west of the Maghreb and in the Upper Nile, and the label Garamantes was often applied generically to the inhabitants of the Sahara.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, contemporary commentators evidently felt that the evangelization of the desert was underway, even if the practical realities of this are uncertain. It might also be noted in this context that textual sources report missions into Nubia and Aksum in the middle of Justinian's reign. Although this was a certainly separate evangelical process – and concerned groups living more than 1,000 miles away in what is now Sudan and Ethiopia – it fit into a similar celebration of truly ecumenical Christianity under Justinian.<sup>201</sup> After the mid-540s, political and religious policies were increasingly intertwined across imperial Africa, and this seems to have been a deliberate strategy.

Such sources can only provide an impressionistic picture of imperial religious policy in the far south and cannot tell us very much at all about the actual impact of Christianity among the communities of the desert, but they provide an important context for our reading of Corippus' *Iohannis*.<sup>202</sup> The poet's account of a rebellion fuelled by arcane religious beliefs, spawned in the distant oracle centres of the desert and finally overcome by the shining light of Roman Christianity, accords well with this new evangelical strategy. It is hard to say whether the narrative of the *Iohannis* had its own agency in the development of this policy, or simply reflected contemporary thinking, but it must add a further layer to the interpretation of his accounts of Moorish paganism and (especially) the

<sup>198</sup> Proc. *Buildings*, VI.4.12–13. <sup>199</sup> Ioh Biclar. a.569 7, 9; a.571.

<sup>200</sup> Diehl (1896), 328; Desanges (1962), 256–7. Engelhardt (1974), 67–71.

<sup>201</sup> Compare John of Ephesus HE IV.8 and compare Pseudo Dionysius of Tel Mahre, *Chronicle*. a.534/5 (Wittakowski 1996, 50–64). See especially the overview in Greatrex (2014b).

<sup>202</sup> Roques (2007), 299–300, surely overstates the case in asserting that this evangelism was wholly successful.

narratives of the oracle visitations of Books III and VI. Whether these stories were invented retrospectively to justify imperial actions against traditional desert cult centres, or this evangelism responded to stories like these is not certain. But this is a reminder that the situation Corippus described was very much the product of the sixth century, and did not reflect timeless religious realities.

Corippus' silence on the Christianity (or otherwise) of Cusina and the Moorish allies also makes more sense in this context. As we saw in Chapter 4, the poet's representation of the Moorish world was less polarized than has sometimes been thought: barbaric as the belligerent Moors may have seemed, Corippus nevertheless looked forward to a future in which the different peoples of Africa might join together among the subject peoples of Rome, and he regarded Cusina and his allies as both an illustration of this principle and a means to this end. Yet these allied Moors are never included in the warm celebration of the Roman Christian army within the *Iohannis*, and this is difficult to explain. Corippus may have been aware that Cusina and his allies were not Christians – at least as the term would be understood in Carthage – and so maintained a tactful silence on their faith. Equally, he may simply have been ignorant of the practices of these groups or been aware that the tens of thousands of Moors who rallied to the Roman standards followed many different religions. Perhaps the solution is to be found in his refusal to identify these groups as 'pagan': if these friendly Moors were not obviously included in Justinian's Christian commonwealth, nor were they explicitly excluded from it. This ambiguity – a religious affiliation left unexamined, that might take on a different hue in different political contexts – may reflect quite faithfully the rapidly changing situation of the late 540s.

### Conclusions

Corippus presents his epic as a timeless struggle between the light of the church and the arcane evils of Moorish paganism, but his account is demonstrably a product of the delicate world of the late 540s and early 550s. The *Iohannis* was intended to present John's campaigns as a panacea to the evils that had beset North Africa over the previous two decades. To that end, the poet cast the general as a crusading hero, a champion of Christian order against Moorish chaos. But these binaries did not entirely neglect the seething religious tensions within the contemporary African church. Corippus may not have dealt directly with the developing schism of the Three Chapters controversy, and like the vast majority of Christian poets steered well clear of articulating a particular dogmatic position within



his work, but the *Iohannis* did not ignore these tensions entirely. In casting two prominent African religious dissidents as recognizable (if anonymised) figures within the epic, and presenting both as unambiguous supporters of the imperial military effort and its mission 'to protect the humble and suppress the proud', Corippus made his own contribution to this debate. In his telling, John's victories provided a rallying point for *all* African Christians, regardless of their doctrinal differences.

Corippus' portrait of Moorish 'paganism' was also recognizably a composition of the mid-sixth century. Although his scintillating accounts of frenzied Ammonian prophecies and human sacrifices made in the name of Mastiman have sometimes been read as a timeless portrait of 'traditional' Libyan religion, they are scarcely so straightforward. Even once we have cleared away the thick blanket of literary convention which covers these passages, it is apparent that the religious practices described in the poem were themselves manifestations of the changing political and social world of the sixth century. 'Moorish' leaders and groups found in the worship of the Libyan gods points of political cohesion in new constellations of power. The details of this are impossible to trace with confidence, but the role Gurzil played in drawing together a novel Laguatan alliance which transcended social and geographical boundaries offers some hint of how this might have worked on the ground. This did not simply involve the perpetuation of traditional ancestral practices, but may well have changed as the kaleidoscope of local identities shifted. On balance, Corippus is probably reliable on many specific details of Moorish pagan practice in the mid-sixth century, even if other episodes (like Guenfan's first journey to the oracle, or the details of Carcasan's prophecy) must be treated with care. But we must be very cautious indeed about connecting this testimony to earlier accounts or to archaeological evidence from earlier periods. Like all religious behaviours, those of 'the Moors' surely changed considerably over time.

Finally, the *Iohannis* must be read against the programme of evangelism which the emperor seems to have instituted in the aftermath of John's victories. Our evidence for this is admittedly slender, and largely consists of several telling episodes from Procopius' *Buildings*, and a handful of scattered (and often elusive) archaeological testimony. Nevertheless, if the imperial forces in Africa did consolidate their victory with an attempt to convert the pre-desert and oasis settlements beyond the frontiers – even if this was only ever a token gesture – the particular emphasis of Corippus' *Iohannis* is all the clearer. The poet's fascinated focus on the arcane features of Moorish paganism can thus be read in a valedictory light – as the last flourishing of the demonic gods before their worship was ended forever.



## Conclusions

The *Iohannis* remains something of a puzzle. Corippus' motivations in composing the work, the degree to which he manipulated his knowledge of the recent past to meet his own literary ends and the innumerable details of the poem's Latin all resist straightforward elucidation. But an appreciation of the delicate political position of Justinianic North Africa at the time of its composition is crucial to appreciating the historical importance of the poem and casts a great deal of light upon the text that survives to us. This in turn allows us to consider the *Iohannis* as a meaningful source on the early history of imperial rule in the region, and not simply as a repository of discrete points of historical or ethnographic information, or indeed as a thoughtless regurgitation of imperial 'propaganda'. Repeated political and military convulsions had destabilized the Byzantine occupation almost from its outset, and had left a profound mark upon the economy and society of Africa.<sup>1</sup> This pattern can only have been exacerbated by the plague of 543 and (perhaps) by the poor harvests which had struck other parts of the Mediterranean world following the cold snap of 536. As we have seen, the military presence across the region was chronically underfunded and beset by internal rivalries, and the authority of Constantinople was all but severed during Guntharith's revolt in the winter of 546. This grim history can occasionally be glimpsed in the contemporary chronicles: when the compilers of such histories bothered to mention North Africa at all, it was generally to lament the latest news from Carthage of rebellion and revolt. The latter parts of Procopius' *Vandal War* and the caustic observations of the same writer's *Secret History* present a similar image, far removed from the giddy triumphalism of the early days of the occupation. Against this bleak backdrop, John Troglita's victories in the border wars of 546–8 must have seemed a reassuring change of fortunes and worthy of celebration. Admittedly, not all contemporaries saw it in those terms, and the victories

<sup>1</sup> The narrative is outlined in Chapters 2 and 5.

do not seem to have received wide notice outside Africa: Procopius and Jordanes both pass over the campaigns swiftly and no other sources bother to mention them at all.<sup>2</sup> In the febrile political world of Carthage, however, unambiguous successes in the field could nevertheless be magnified into something greater, and this is the best context in which to read the *Iohannis*. While the ‘Moors’ had never represented the greatest threat to stable imperial rule in North Africa – and indeed Antalas, the great antagonist of the early part of Corippus’ epic, had been one of the few champions of Justinianic rule just a few months earlier – this did not prevent the poet from presenting these victories as a political turning point. The *Iohannis* is a celebration of the imperial presence in North Africa, but he did not turn to Belisarius’ conquest of 533/4 to make this point, nor to the release of the African Nicene church from its Vandal captivity, but instead to the recent victories of the general John.

The narrative flexibility of historical epic allowed Corippus to navigate this potentially treacherous terrain.<sup>3</sup> Through the long historical analepsis of Books III and IV, Corippus was able to interrogate the troubled recent history of his homeland, at once acknowledging the difficulties which Africa had faced (and which must have stood stark in the memories of the poet and his immediate audience) and presenting these difficulties as safely in the past. Modern commentators have often asserted that Corippus’ is a wholly positive rendering of the early years of the occupation, bathed in a warm nostalgic glow, but barring a few short passages, which relate quite as much to the Vandal period as to the years after Belisarius’ landing, its tone is almost unremittingly bleak. The poet’s ventriloquism here – his presentation of this overview in the voice of one of his characters, and the subsequent addition of further accounts in the reported speech of the rebel Antalas and the voice of John himself – created further distance between the celebratory intent of the epic and the troubling substance of these bitter memories. Equally important were the prolepses of the *Iohannis*, which firmly established the better times which would surely follow the trials of war, and which clearly establish the epic itself as a testimony to John’s spectacular successes. Through such strategies, the narrator, his characters and ultimately the audience repeatedly look forward to the inevitable resolution of their shared struggle and the triumphal ceremony to come. None of these narrative approaches was original to Corippus – indeed all had been conventional features of Latin epic since at least Virgil’s *Aeneid* – but the sixth-century African poet made effective

<sup>2</sup> Proc. *BVIV*.28.50–2; Jord. *Rom* 385.    <sup>3</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3.

political use of them. In his deft shifts of temporal register he could reflect on the troubling recent past, celebrate the bloody months of fighting and anticipate a peaceful resolution.

Scholarship on Byzantine Africa has long emphasized the political and military challenge developing 'Berber' polities posed to Justinian's newest provinces, but a detailed analysis of the *Iohannis* must complicate this image substantially. Important work has carefully differentiated between the different 'Moorish' societies which emerged in the political penumbra of Numidia and Byzacium, led by men who might have aspirations to imperial office, and the sedentary groups, seasonal pastoralists and transhumants living across Tripolitania and Syrtica, and the pre-deserts and oases beyond.<sup>4</sup> Corippus has been an essential source for much of this scholarship, and the portrait he presents of the extended frontier world is an unusually rich one. But while modern scholars have frequently invoked the *Iohannis* to support their own varied interpretations of these societies, the epic has often proved a false friend. Corippus could be scorchingly chauvinistic about hostile 'barbarian' groups, but did not regard 'Moors' and 'Romans' as implacably opposed – indeed, he repeatedly stresses the importance of allied Moors to John's military operation. Nor was his view of African society divided along geographical lines: he was evidently acutely aware of the differences between groups living in different parts of the frontier world (and deploys ethnographic language which is often remarkably precise, even if the details are sometimes lost on us), but he was also ready to blur these categories when his literary concerns – or historical understanding – demanded it. Even Corippus' Christian perspective offered only a partial clarification of the confused ethnography of North Africa. While his descriptions of Moorish paganism are among the most memorable of the *Iohannis*, and in themselves offer an invaluable testimony to certain aspects of religious practice, as we have seen, Corippus never emphasizes the Christian faith of John's Moorish allies, as a purely religious framing of this conflict surely required.

In order to understand Corippus' view of the Moorish world we must appreciate the literary form in which he wrote. The Virgilian motif *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* – the conceit that Roman rule was empowered to 'grant the conquered clemency and crush the proud in war' – surfaces throughout the *Iohannis* (as it has recurred throughout the present study). Nowhere was the truth of this dictum more clearly illustrated than in the complex political loyalties of the North Africans themselves. The only

<sup>4</sup> See especially Modéran (2003a) and see the full discussion of this scholarship in Chapter 4.

meaningful point of distinction in a world of townspeople, estate owners and pastoralists, mountain-, plain- and desert-dwellers, was the willingness to be subject to – and hence fight for – the power of Rome. This is why the Moorish ally Cusina occupies such a prominent role within the epic, going so far as to quell an embryonic uprising within the Roman army itself and ultimately risking his life for his allies. His contribution to John's campaign validated the Virgilian motif. This may also be why the poet devotes so many lines to the visceral details of the battles themselves. Such spectacular rendering of bloodshed surpasses even the gruesome detail of Lucan or the Flavian poets and would have been strikingly out of place in a conventional panegyric.<sup>5</sup> Doubtless, Corippus took the opportunity to display his own virtuosity – and many of his sequences are indeed ingenious – but it was also here where the reality of Virgil's sentiment was most clearly expressed. For subject and rebel alike, it was on the battlefield where loyalty was truly tested and its implications worked out. Friend and foe looked disturbingly similar in the dust and clamour of the battlefield, as the poet repeatedly emphasizes, and only the brutal resolution of warfare allowed the imperial commonwealth in Africa to be reconstituted.

The *Iohannis* is almost unique in the extant writing of Byzantine Africa in having almost nothing to say on the burgeoning doctrinal controversies of the 540s and 550s. Corippus' very silence on the Three Chapters controversy has led to the suggestion that the poem was intended in part as a salve to this deepening wound – an attempt to demonstrate African loyalty at a time of religious crisis.<sup>6</sup> It is certainly true that the epic presents a soft-focus view of a unified African Christianity, shared by soldier and citizen alike and defined above all by its conquest of Moorish paganism. Yet in spite of this, Corippus was primarily concerned with political and social themes, as the epic form in which he worked stipulated. The *Iohannis* must be read as an imperial text, but one written by – and for – an African population at once scarred by almost two decades of governmental incompetence and anxious to find a position for themselves within a world that had recently come to look rather better. Corippus chose an unusual literary medium in which to explore these themes – and the loss of other possible examples of extended historical epic from this period makes the *Iohannis* seem all the more eccentric – but epic offered a means to reflect on this rapidly changing world. Corippus' extraordinary epic can be fully appreciated only in these terms.

<sup>5</sup> Discussed in Chapter 5.    <sup>6</sup> Discussed in Chapter 6.

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